

THE RHODESIANS

BY STRACEY·CHAMBERS



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THE RHODESIANS

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*SKETCHES OF ENGLISH
SOUTH-AFRICAN LIFE*

BY
STRACEY CHAMBERS



JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON AND NEW YORK
1900

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TYPES

THREE was a coming and a going and a general commotion in the vicinity of the Palace Hotel. A running into each other of 'rickshas and Cape carts,—for somehow or other the newly installed electric light had refused to work, and so the streets were in Cimmerian darkness,—a condition of things that occasioned involuntary descents into the sluits, those abysses known to every inhabitant as "Mainwaring's man-traps."

Now all this and much more was happening because the First Train had arrived at the temporary station that morning. To tell the truth, it was n't the *first* train at all, nor even the train by courtesy dubbed the First; for the Special, containing all the *most* important people, was either off the line near

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the Matoppos or “hung up” somewhere on the Shashi River,—I forget which now; besides, it does n’t in the least matter, for in the “copy” we’d scribbled over-night and cabled Home in the morning before all these events took place, we’d told the British Public that “everything went off without a hitch,” trusting that Providence would bear us out when the moment came.

As a matter of fact, though, hurried consultations at the eleventh hour had resulted in the High Commissioner, who’d arrived incog. as it were the night before, skootting¹ down the line a couple of miles and returning triumphantly on an impromptu Special to the strains of an inebriated bagpipe tootling “See the Conquering Hero Comes!” “God Save the Queen!” and the rest of it!

Heavens! how the Boys did yell! How the Company men beamed, bowed, and fussed,—all talking at the same time and no one listening! Then there was an Address to be read inside a tent like a Turkish bath, where the men mopped themselves and the women fainted.

¹ “Skoot,” *i. e.*, South African form of “scoot.”

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And the Mottoes ! Oh, those Mottoes ! “ Change here for Cairo ! ” “ Welcome to the Overland African Express ! ” to say nothing of those startling, if somewhat obscure, announcements of : “ *Hic jacet !* ” “ *Una Voce !* ” likewise, “ *Et in Pluribus Unum !* ” “ *Ex Nihilo Nihil fit !* ” and “ *Requiescat in Pace !* ”

Well, it was night now, and inside the Palace Hotel Paterson’s waiters were scurrying hither and thither ; the wine-steward — he with the badge on his arm — being the man in greatest demand, for it’s a thirsty country, where in time a man is apt to drink from sheer force of habit, don’t you know !

Dinner was over, and speechifying in full swing. Most of Our Illustrious Guests had in suave accents and rounded periods said all that was expected of them ; the Deputy Administrator had risen to quite unexpected heights of eloquence, made his mark and “ brought down the house.” It still remained for a few of the local men to distinguish themselves, and consequently little Horsley — Horsley, you know, of the

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Matabele Unit Gold Mining Co., Limited — had after several ineffectual attempts been surreptitiously hoisted into position by the Attorney-General for Barotseland, and was now well under way in that masterpiece of rhetoric he meant to “knock ‘em” with.

Horsley of the Matabele, etc., was a man of powerful intellect in his own estimation, and a ticklish customer in that of many. And this indeed might be said for him, that, even when drunk, Horsley never lost his habitual shrewdness and caution,—traits which had been of material assistance in raising him from the position of clerk in an accountant’s office in Kimberley to that of Manager-in-Chief of the Matabele Unit Gold Mining Co., Limited, with a finger in most other South African undertakings where there was a chance of money being made.

Yet on the surface Horsley was as excitable a little spitfire of a chap as you ever met! Pooh-pooh the probability of a paying output, just for the sake of “pulling his leg,” as it were, and he would be up and at

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you like a terrier in the twinkling of an eye. Get him on his legs at a Public Dinner, like the present, with just that glass too much which gives a rosy tint to life and things in general, and Horsley would talk, talk, talk till all was blue. Now he happened to be in a line with the press-men, loathly creatures,— for whom Horsley entertained feelings of particular aversion, for they have a way of wanting to know too much. So, seeing these objects of his special detestation and being in the humour, Horsley “went for them.”

“ And,” he roared, fixing his eye on the man from a certain Financial Organ given to “bearing” the Kaffir Market, “ and when the merry sound of the stamp is heard through the length and breadth of our glorious land, *then* let those irresponsible scribblers from Fleet Street — those members of the ink-slinging rabble, who pollute the air, who come between us and the *Truth*, even as a swarm of locusts obscure the light of the sun, infesting the world with their pestilential ‘copy’ — *then* let each one of them slink away and hide his diminished head,”

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etc., etc., etc., shrieked the little man, waving his arms abroad, hysterically eloquent ; but the press-men murmured “Rats” one to the other, as they scribbled down notes on their cuffs, on the back of the bill of fare, on anything that came handy, exchanging the while a private code of nods and winks with those poor devils, the limp and perspiring shorthand reporters, who, seated just in front of Horsley, were receiving the full blast of his eloquence on the tops of their respective heads. Yet when the Orator had said his say, these wily “Representatives” shouted with the best of them :

“ Well done, Horsley ! Go it, old boy ! Wire in ! Give it them ! Hooray ! Bravo ! Hip, hip, hip, hooray !!! ” and getting on to his feet, each man — to the accompaniment of the B. S. A. P. Band — expressed it as his opinion (in different keys) that he, Horsley of the Matabele Unit Gold Mining Co., Ltd., was a “jolly good fellow,” and they would have been quite ready then and there to fight any man who might even have hinted anything to the contrary.

Now it happened that all the while Mrs.

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Horsley, her bosom swelling with pride, sat drinking in these honeyed praises of her spouse among the other wives, who had ensconced themselves amidst their lords' and masters' hats, overcoats, and the other impedimenta of the boarded-off dressing-room.

Elated at Mr. Horsley's success as a public speaker, Mrs. Horsley shot a triumphant glance in the direction of little Mrs. Moffat, the Ordinance clerk's wife, who pretended not to see it — though she did.

However, she could afford not to mind things to-night, thought little Mrs. Moffat, for had not the Deputy Administrator's wife called for her, Maisie Moffat, in the omnibus engaged to carry the Deputy Administrator's guests to that unsightly erection dubbed the Palace Hotel. There was a time once, when the Ordinance clerk's wife and Mrs. Horsley had been the "dearest of friends," — that had been when they were both nurses at Kimberley, in the Kimberley of halcyon days now past. Both had married patients there, as of course they had intended doing ; only, unfortunately, in

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the case of little Mrs. Moffat there had been certain prenuptial indiscretions, which the other women took care she should not forget. Well might she fume and fret,—for she was a pretty little woman, on the whole, as colonial women go,—but to-night there was an abiding sense of sweetness in the memory of Ada Horsley's countenance of blank surprise when, having dashed up to the hotel door in her own cart, she actually beheld with her own eyes little Mrs. Moffat being helped out of the Deputy Administrator's omnibus by his Honour's white man.

For fully half an hour she had sat, packed like a herring, between the Governor of Natal's lady and the Greatest Living African Explorer, and yet the time had seemed too short to Maisie Moffat, who would gladly have driven on to the Matoppos in such company.

It had been so dark that few had seen her, but, at all events, Ada Horsley had, and this knowledge was enough to compensate for many of Ada's numerous 'pin-pricks,'—for, frankly speaking, Ada was a cat.

How often had little Mrs. Moffat, sit-

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ting alone on her stoep, which was never darkened by the shadow of the “best people,” gone back to the past and ruminated over those old Kimberley days, — honestly acknowledging to herself that she’d made a mess of her life. She didn’t even much care for her husband, but she’d got accustomed to him, and according to her lights did what she called “her duty by him.”

Dick Moffat, every one agreed, was a fool. He had no grit. Unless you kept propping him up, he was always falling together, morally speaking, and it was only a sort of pity “for that poor little woman, don’t you know,” that made his chief wink at his subordinate’s incompetence and other frailties, although perhaps the latter may have awakened a fellow-feeling for the erring Moffat. Anyway he managed to hang on to his billet somehow when men no worse were sent about their business in double-quick time.

Little Mrs. Moffat indeed felt that her cup was full, when, added to Dick’s iniquities, she experienced the galling bitterness of Ada Horsley’s social successes (*sic!*), her

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clothes from Home (it would be from Paris in the golden by-and-bye), and her furniture for that new house on the Suburban Stands from Maple's, for — strange as it may seem to the non-colonial mind — “suits” from the Tottenham Court Road emporium would appear here to be the crowning point of all things desirable.

When Maisie Moffat returned home that night (for the Deputy Administrator's omnibus had dropped her on its way back at the door of her fifteen-pound-a-month tin cottage), she sat long into the night waiting for the uncertain footstep of her worthless husband, and little fluttering hopes of future marks of recognition from the “Powers that be” flitted again and again across her mind.

Ada Horsley, however, was just a shade out of humour that night, and even snapped the innocent Horsley's head nearly off, when he chanced to make some passing remark concerning the party from Government House.

“Government House party indeed!” with fine scorn. “We shall be coming to a pretty pass soon, if Government House is going to

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be 'hail fellow well met' with *all sorts* of persons. However, I'm thankful to say *I* know how to keep some in their places." With which comforting assurance Mrs. Horsley fell into a sleep disturbed by dreams of little Mrs. Moffat's phenomenal success at some big Government Official's *Somewhere*—and herself *Nowhere*!

MINE HOST ACHILLE

MONSIEUR ACHILLE sat in his den behind the dining-saloon of the Grand National in Abercorn Street, re-viewing the situation. It was late; the last customer had gone; the waiters — of which few were to the manner born, but had drifted into it as you do into most things in South Africa, from force of circumstances — were clearing away, and the Parisian Chef was swearing in kitchen Kaffir which partook of a strong Irish brogue at the native boys as they chattered over the washing up.

There was a cloud on the brow of Monsieur Achille, and he had sipped, refilled, and re-emptied his *petit verre* until he had come to that point when a man of his temperament weeps. It was hard — money was scarce and duns were many — Peste ! sacré chien ! and the rest of it ! Was he not a poor devil, he asked himself ? Was it not for

Mine Host Achille

reasons akin to these which now assailed him that Monsieur Achille had quitted *La Belle France* one dark night in a hurry,—reasons for which some of his compatriots ardently desired his return and were solicitous as to news of his whereabouts? Even Johannesburg had proved no abiding resting-place, and Monsieur Achille had quitted the Transvaal after the Raid in order to explore the territories of the Chartered Company. Here two months since he had, with true national adaptability and the instincts of his race, opened the “Café Grand National,” with its “Private Room for Ladies,” “The best Chef in Rhodesia,” and a menu half a yard long, announcing “Julienne” (i. e. the rinsings of yesterday’s saucepans with a handful of desiccated vegetables thrown in); “Fresh Fish” (canned somewhere in America, and smothered in a dubious-looking slimy fluid resembling bill-stickers’ paste), while “Haunch of Mutton and red currant jelly” (otherwise “leg” with raspberry jam), and “Lamb” (i. e. same leg with mint sauce), were among the diurnal dainties doled out on white enamel ware

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to the numerous Boys with healthy appetites who form the human machinery of the various Limited Liability Companies and Government Offices in the town, mostly boys who had come out with exalted ideas of "a free and easy" life in the B. S. A., who had dreamt of becoming the owners of phenomenal reefs and all the rest of it! during those intervals not given up to acute physical sufferings between Southampton Docks and Table Bay, who'd planked down their shilling at the Mines Office before they'd been barely twenty-four hours in the place, and were glad enough now to draw their "twenty quid" a month in the Company Promoter's Office, — for it's the whale that swallows the smaller fish and thrives.

Twenty quid! not bad according to Home reckoning. "In my young days a boy would have put by at least half," remarks Paterfamilias, with that happy forgetfulness fathers have of their own youth; but supposing you board at a restaurant, and pay twelve pounds in advance for your month's "skoff," four more for your room, such as it is, and another for your Matabele boy, — to say

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nothing of that little bill to the Malay lady who gets up your shirts and charges six-pence for the privilege of a clean collar,— well, taking all these things into consideration, the princely stipend of twenty pounds is apt to look foolish long before the thirty days have come to an end, and it's "stony-broke" 's the motto then, and "I say, old chap, call round at four, I 'm hanged if I 've got any change," by which hour the Boy takes care to be out on "most important business," business which generally necessitates a vast consumption of whiskey and soda.

Monsieur Achille's boarders paid the usual twelve pounds which entitled them to breakfast, tiffin, and dinner; and across the dingy table-cloths that decked Monsieur Achille's board, where the oily butter swam about helplessly amidst tepid water in a *ci-devant* green finger-bowl, where the cheese plates, glass, and the cups and saucers were placed upside down in order to minimize the amount of red dust they were bound to contain,— across these tables, where the atmosphere was laden with an abiding odour

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of stale cabbage-water, many a firm friendship was first formed, taking deep root and bearing fruit in the Boy's after-life.

The weary waiters had departed. Monsieur Achille still sat sipping the greenish fluid in his liqueur glass and thinking. O'Flaherty, the "French Chef," lurched in and supported himself against the door-post.

"Begorra, Asheel!" he hiccuped forth, "I'm blamed if that there mutton has n't been an' gone an' turned, an' it's the very Kaffir bhoys as won't sleep near it—an' small blame to them, sez I!"

"Then, mon ami, we must have curry tomorrow," returned Monsieur Achille, with decision, "curry *à la Raja*," he murmured pensively, fixing his eyes on O'Flaherty's besotted countenance; "my friend, you have no imagination."

"Oh, me Christian aunt!" muttered the Irishman, as he left his chief's presence, and sprinkling a handful of pepper over the elevated mutton, retired to his bunk in that waste of milk tins and whiskey bottles, that spreads from the back regions of the Grand

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National to the rear of the offices on Main Street.

When his aide-de-camp had gone, Monsieur Achille allowed his eye to travel down the local news-sheet lying on the table before him, and there suddenly seemed some connection between his own thoughts and the paper, headed "Grave News from the Transvaal," "More of Kruger's Cheek," for his eyes assumed a greater look of intelligence, and he hastily fetched a paper and pencil, on which he wrote and re-wrote, until the substance of what he had written ran as follows:

"CRISIS IN THE TRANSVAAL!"

"Monsieur Achille has the honour to inform his numerous and distinguished clientèle, that in order to show his appreciation of their generous support, his unbounded admiration of the great cause of Liberty as personified by the Flag under which it has been his privilege to find an *asile*, and lastly in order to mark his abhorrence of the Transvaal and her present attitude of defiance towards the great and good English nation — that he has reduced his terms to boarders for the ensuing month to £9, payable as usual in advance."

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And with this document in his hand, Monsieur Achille issued from his café and bent his steps in the direction of the "Times" office.

The next morning a flaring pink announcement of Monsieur Achille's gratitude and political partisanship was shoved under every door by a little black piccanin'.

"Hallo!" cried one cowboy-hatted, coatless youth to another, as they issued from their respective doors out onto the stoep. "I say! prices are climbing down a bit; even Achille has reduced his board — three quid to the good with a Variety show coming up — not bad, eh? Fancy I'll 'skoff' with Achille this month, no worse than the rest after all!" And so, being the commencement of the month, on the first of which the bills fly out and on the seventh of which "he pays who can," the Boys handed the benevolent and smiling Achille £9 each, wherewith to have the nourishment for their inner man provided, and went their way, jubilant at the economy they had practised.

But behold! that night Monsieur Achille,

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stepping forth nimbly under the cover of darkness, hied him to the siding the Mail train starts from, and unobtrusively demanded a ticket for De Aar; and so it came to pass that when the Boys turned out for their morning's "skoff" next day, the door of the Grand National was shut, and O'Flaherty, the Parisian Chef, was "painting the air pink;" but Monsieur Achille, with his pockets stuffed out with the paper notes representing the Boys' monthly board, sat rapidly approaching the frontier, and formulating new and bolder plans for a future career to be lived under a new name.

ONE OF THE RANK AND FILE

THREE sides of a square composed of bathing-machines off wheels—at least, that's the first impression you get—but they are in reality little canvas-ceilinged, corrugated-iron-roofed, brick-floored rooms, connected by a corrugated-iron verandah—or stoep, as they call it out here—running all round; fourth side open to Main Street, ankle-deep in the red brown dust that lies like a pall on everything and everybody, even during the intervals of the rainy season.

In the centre more corrugated iron in the shape of a well, about which the native boys cluster chattering like apes. Most of the doors stand open. Here you see a stretcher covered with railway rugs and Kaffir blankets; there a small table, rigged out with the little souvenirs some Mother's Darling has brought out with him, while the walls bear trophies in the way of rusty assegais, Matabele shields, and Kaffir

One of the Rank and File

spoons, interspersed with faded photographs of Mabel Love, Letty Lind, and whoever may have been the Music Hall prime favourite when the Boy left home. The rest of the wall is dotted with holes sacred to the white ant, from whence he runs up those columns of red earth over-night with a persistency worthy of a better cause, knowing, as he must by now, that as sure as fate the Kaffir boy will annihilate his labours with one sweep of his flat long-handled broom in the morning.

Outside, on the blank space of wall that intervenes between every two of these bathing-machines hangs the boy's zinc bath, and from a nail in the stoep support dangles his canvas water-bag.

It's dark, though not late,—for night falls apace out here, with no “betwixt and between” in the way of twilight.

Two men sat out on the stoep in front of their respective doors in the deck chairs they had brought up country with them. A packing-case turned upside down served as table, and a whiskey bottle containing a candle illumined the situation.

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“Young Conyers sick,” remarked one of them, removing the pipe from his lips and knocking the ash out over the fox terrier that lay stretched full length at his side.

“So I heard,” rejoined the other, without raising his eyes from the “Matabele Times” he was reading; “not feeding properly and fever on top—that’s about it, eh?”

“Right you are,” rejoined the other, and there was a moment’s silence; then the man with the “Times” exclaimed:

“I say, d’you see this? ‘England awake’—‘Arms for South Africa’—‘War Rumours,’ ructions in the Transvaal before long—you bet!”

“That’ll spell ruin for most of us up here if they go kicking up a shindy before we’ve had an output—”

“Oh, confound the output! I’m getting sick of the whole blooming show!”

“That’s all very well, but here’s the dry season coming on, and the machinery for the Mawabani on its way up—”

“Oh! I know that machinery—so do you! rusting down at Francistown, eh? if it’s even got as far! Oh! it makes me

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sick, it does — if there 's to be any fighting, I 'm for potting off a few of those Boer chaps, so there ! By the way, is the mail in ? I was thinking of Conyers — my people left off writing long ago — my fault, I suppose — things generally are ; ” and he gave a sardonic little chuckle.

“ No, not yet ; I went down to see. Train ran off the rails near Fig Tree.” There was the sound of a feeble voice through the darkness, and both men turned towards the open door of a room hard by.

“ Thelluson,” said the voice.

“ Yes, old chap,” returned the man addressed, — he was the man with the dog, — and his voice became as tender as a woman's as he groped his way into the confined little box of a room where a fair-haired, lantern-jawed boy lay tossing beneath a gaudy Kaffir blanket.

“ What 's that about the mail ? ” he inquired huskily.

“ Not in, my boy,” said the older man, soothingly ; but he was glad the darkness prevented his seeing the disappointment he knew would be on the emaciated face.

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“There’s been a break-down at Fig Tree, so it can’t get in much before midnight,” he continued, groping his way to the stretcher and sitting down on the foot.

“Just my luck! A fellow seems to fancy a Home letter when he’s sick, don’t you know—and I thought the mail was being sorted by this time,” he added, with a faint apologetic little laugh that ended miserably.

“Conyers, you can’t go on like this—you must go into hospital to-morrow—”

“I sha’n’t, though!” cried the boy.

“I say,” inquired Thelluson, “who the devil’s looking after you? I thought Marshall was your pal? Where is he?”

“Gone on the bust.”

“And what have you had to-day?”

“Did n’t want anything,” answered the weak voice, evasively.

“What have you had to-day?” repeated Thelluson, sternly.

“Nothing,” said the Boy, meekly. The older man was silent for a moment and then he said:

“Conyers, you ’ll be killing yourself.”

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“Does n’t much matter if I do,” returned the Boy, sullenly.

“Don’t be a young idiot!” exclaimed Thelluson, sharply. A convulsive shudder shook the bed—the Boy was sobbing.

“I say, youngster, don’t—I did n’t mean to be a brute!” and Thelluson stroked the damp curly head with an almost caressing touch.

“I’m a d——d fool!” blubbered the Boy, “getting as soft as a girl!”

“Why, you’re as weak as a rat—buck up, my lad, it’s feeding you want—Lord save us, man, how do you expect to feel after your second go of fever?”

The Boy was silent, his wasted hands plucked at the Kaffir blanket, and Thelluson’s voice seemed to come from afar off. A bell clanged out on the still air.

“I say, how about skoff? Coming over to Achille’s?” inquired the man outside, as he rose, stretched himself, extinguished the guttering candle, and kicked the fox terrier into wakefulness.

“All right—I’m coming,” answered Thelluson, rising; but he hesitated, uncertain

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whether to go. "Seems drowsy," he muttered, but it was too dark to see the grey look on the Boy's pinched features.

"Conyers, I 'll send you over some slop or other, and mind you take it." There was no answer. "He's dozing," was Thelluson's remark to himself as he left the room on tiptoe and joined his friend and the terrier who stood awaiting him, and they strolled over to the Grand National.

"Got any soupy stuff, Achille?" demanded Thelluson.

"Mais oui, certainement!" Monsieur Achille had *du consommé*.

"Consommy, is it?" remarked Thelluson, as he eyed the dingy brown fluid suspiciously. "Well, Achille, we 'll have some consommy then in a basin, and you put it down to me — comprenny? Hi! boy!" he continued, collaring one of Achille's Kaffirs, "Hamba lo skoff — sick boss over lappa!" waving his hand in the direction of the rooms. "Number 3 — 1, 2, 3," ticking off the numbers on his fingers ; and the boy sped off with a gleam of intelligence and a muttered "Yebo."

The Kaffir crept into the room, deposited

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the little bowl on the Boy's tin trunk and departed, having fulfilled his mission; but the Boy slept on.

After dinner Thelluson and the other man dropped into the Empire; for there was the rare excitement of a Music Hall Company from Johannesburg in town, and Flo, the "Male Impersonator," had taken the Boys by storm. They had stayed longer than they thought, for Flo was side-splitting, what with her naughty song and her break-down; and the Boys yelled themselves hoarse over and over again, which required the counteraction of whiskies and sodas *ad lib.* As it was, Thelluson left the other man three sheets in the wind and seeing Flo double, when after looking at his watch he hurried over to the Boy's room—But all was still—so still.

"He's getting a nice rest," thought Thelluson, and going to his own bunk on the other side, he turned in.

When Thelluson woke the next morning, his first thought was about the Boy and his second of the mail.

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“I’ll go down and see if there’s anything for him before going over,” he decided, and did so.

“Anything for the name of Conyers?” he asked across the double row of men of all ages who stood impatiently waiting before the post-office counter.

“Conyers? No. Oh! just wait a bit, Alec Conyers? Yes, oh yes,” and the flurried clerk fumbled among the “C’s” till Thelluson swore. “Look sharp, will you!” and he snatched the thin envelope with the Home stamps on it, and almost ran in his hurry to get to the Boy.

A few steps down the street he met Marshall; he was white, with a frightened look on his face and the signs of recent debauch plainly visible.

“I say—oh, Thelluson, I say, something’s up—so help me God—Conyers—I can’t get him to wake—” and the blear-eyed youth shook helplessly.

“Have you been for any one?” demanded Thelluson.

“N—n—no, I—I came for you—”

“You dashed idiot, there—get along!”

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and pushing Marshall aside with a force that made him stagger, Thelluson ran to a door with a plate on it at the corner of Critic Buildings. A few hasty words of explanation, and a medical man and Thelluson hurried across to the Boy's room.

"He had fever, you know, in January, and pulled through all right, but his berth got filled up, and he's been down on his luck since," said Thelluson, rapidly, "and this is the second touch, and —"

They had entered the room and stood beside the stretcher — the Boy lay there with his grey face turned to the wall, stone dead. He had been dead for hours, and beside him untasted stood the little basin of cold soup where the Kaffir boy had put it last night.

Thelluson leant against the wall, and his lips twitched.

"Doctor, he'd got it worse than I thought —"

"My dear fellow," said the doctor, gently turning the Boy on to his back, "it was n't the fever that killed him — it was starvation." Then Thelluson remembered the

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letter — it was in a woman's writing — not a young woman's, "Perhaps his mother's" thought Thelluson ; so they placed it beneath his rigid fingers and drew the Kaffir blanket reverently over all that was left of the Boy.

STEPHEN LESLIE, BROKER

IT was getting on for eight o'clock when Stephen Leslie, Broker, turned into Wilson Street, and strolled slowly in the direction of the Moffats' tin cottage.

He had seen Dick Moffat and Marshall entering the Maxim together, as he himself was on his way to dinner at the Grand National. They were going to dine at the Maxim with some other fellows before the great event of the evening,—that prize-fight between Arty Tully and Harry Lee,—and the betting had run high.

Leslie knew, therefore, that even in the event of Dick's not getting run in as a finish to the night's diversions, he would be sure not to return home till the small hours to-morrow morning, and accordingly, on reaching the tin cottage, he pushed the unlatched door open with his foot and walked straight into the room, where Maisie, Dick's wife, stood watching the piccanin as he re-

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moved the remnants of her solitary high tea.

“Oh, it’s you, Mr. Leslie, is it?” remarked Maisie, not very warmly. “I’m sorry Dick’s out.”

“Hang Dick,” ejaculated Leslie, in a tone of undisguised contempt, and throwing himself into a rocking-chair without removing his hands from his trouser-pockets or his hat from his head.

“Hang Dick! I say, Maisie, send that young black brute away!”

Maisie stood irresolute.

“Hamba!” she said to the child, who skooted off with the crockery to those out-lying regions where the fires are built and the Kaffirs sleep, leaving little Mrs. Moffat and her visitor alone.

Then Maisie turned to the man who had been watching her, and remarked:

“I had rather you had not come, Mr. Leslie.”

“Come, Maisie, don’t be a fool,” returned Leslie, rising, and going over to where she stood, he put his two hands on her shoulders, drawing her towards him.

“Don’t,” cried Maisie, under her breath,

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for the cottage was only semi-detached; but it was not so easy to get away from Leslie's hold, and he kissed her again and again, in spite of her evident aversion.

“What if my husband came in!” she gasped with as much indignation as you can throw into a whisper, having at length freed herself from Leslie's embrace.

“Oh, you're not going to gammon me!” returned the man, with a coarse laugh. “Dick's as drunk as a lord by now—he was ‘squiffy’ enough when I saw him this afternoon—if he is n't in the lock-up before morning, I'll eat my hat.”

“I believe you've had too much yourself, so you need n't talk!” retorted Maisie, with her hands up to her head trying to straighten her dishevelled hair.

“Now, 'pon my soul I have n't—if I've had half a dozen drinks since lunch, it's as much as has crossed my lips, bar a bottle of fizz I cracked with old Thelluson at Achille's to-night—so there!”

But Maisie laughed contemptuously.

“Come along, Maisie, what's the matter with you to-night?”

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“Oh, get away, Mr. Leslie,” dodging his outstretched hand; “can’t you see that I don’t want you here?”

This, however, was a matter of the supremest indifference to the broker.

“Oh, you women, you’re all alike! ’Pon my soul, I don’t understand you, Maisie.”

Little Mrs. Moffat was silent, but going towards the door which opened on to the stoep, she pushed it wide and stood on the threshold, gazing up at the Southern Cross. A bat flitted past in the darkness, and all the insect life that sings and chirps through the African night was astir.

“Maisie.”

“What?”

“Maisie, when will you dine with me again?”

Oh, that dinner! It was that dinner, then, that had done it! and Maisie cursed herself for the little idiot she had been—she might have known with a man like Leslie—but there, she had been so dull—always alone—and Dick never took her anywhere. After all, it was he who had brought Leslie to the tin cottage himself,

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telling her to be extra civil to him, as Leslie could, if he would, do a "thing or two" which would be "damned convenient, don't you know," Dick had added, with a mysterious wag of his foolish head, but he had not vouchsafed the nature of these desirable transactions. Like a dutiful wife, however, Maisie had put on her best frock and smiled her sweetest whenever the obliging broker dawned upon the scenes. Now that had all been some time ago. Maisie, in her heart of hearts, had begun to think the "thing or two" to be "off," like so many of Dick's happy-go-lucky undertakings. The broker had, however, meanwhile constituted himself into a species of tame cat, and Maisie had not been ill-pleased, for though but a wishy-washy diluted sort of excitement, even the burly broker was a change — something to speak to, and he even brought her occasional crumbs of superfine gossip, such as falling from the Suburban Stands after percolating through this stratum of social upper crust were eventually bandied about with more coarseness, though perhaps less of the original venom, in the hotel bars.

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All this time Dick boozed his nights away, and was more of a limp rag than ever. Now it was on one of these occasions, and after something very like a row, that Maisie, in that mixed mood which partakes of misery and recklessness, had, after crying her eyes out and calling Dick a "beast," redoubled her efforts at fascinating the broker, and even departed to dine with him at the Market Grill (all this had happened before the Railway festivities), and it was the first time she had done anything of the sort since she had married Dick. The experience of earlier days had taught her that these things were, after all, not good enough. Besides, Maisie, who was not altogether a fool, had "aspirations," and dreamed day-dreams of a strictly orthodox life, in which neither the broker nor Dick had a part.

Leslie seated himself on the edge of the table, lighted a huge cigar over the lamp, and expectorated freely.

"Shall we make it to-morrow, eh?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Leslie."

"I say, Maisie, what's your game? Look here, I'm hanged if I'll stand your

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side, for it 's d——d side, you know. As if there were n't enough women up now. So you need n't be so stand-off. The other day, after I 'd been here, I swore I 'd cut the whole blooming show, I did ; and then again I seem to sort of fancy you, Maisie, and, by gosh, I just can't stay away, chum."

And after having delivered himself of this flow of sentiment, the broker arose, and once more crossed over to where little Mrs. Moffat was standing with her back to him.

"I say, Maisie, come along ; oh, don't be a fool. Dick 's safe enough, you know, and," bending his dissolute face towards her, "and I 've a mind to stay—and I shall too. Look after you a bit, you know." And with a grin he placed his ponderous form between Maisie and the stoep, effectually obstructing the doorway.

They stood there together in silence for a moment, both figures sharply outlined against the lamplight within, and there was a look of unrestrained brute passion on the man's bloated features.

"Come, chum," he whispered hoarsely.

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But Maisie saw the look — a look she had learned to know — and it sickened her, filling her with mingled feelings of rage and loathing.

“ Go ! ” trying to steady her voice, that shook with concentrated fury. “ Go quietly, or there ’ll be a row, and you may take the consequences,” she added recklessly, though her heart quailed, for who in the whole town would believe she ’d not encouraged him?

“ Consequences,” jeered Leslie. “ Oh, I say,” and he chuckled ; “ this is coming it a bit thick, is n’t it ? We ’ve got high and mighty, we have, since the Kimberley days. Look here, don ’t be such a d——d little fool ; you ’re safe enough with me, and —”

But just then a small hand struck him full in the face with all the force it could muster.

“ By G——d ! ” exclaimed the man, taken unawares, and stepping back a pace ; the door, however, was slammed in his face, and he heard the key turn in the lock.

Then he stood still for a moment in blank surprise, for it dawned on him that

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he had actually got the “chuck out,” and in the whole course of his thirty-six years such a thing had never happened to Stephen Leslie, Broker.

“What’s her little game?” he muttered, and finding no satisfactory answer, it suddenly occurred to him that the Market Grill might offer temporary consolation. So he turned on his heel with an elaborate and picturesque “swear” which, though it embraced all womankind in general, was applied to little Mrs. Moffat in particular.

Now it so happened that, as fate would have it, a ’ricksha conveying two ladies in the direction of the Suburban Stands passed at this moment.

“Woa, stop,” cried one feminine voice from within to the ’ricksha boy.

“Dear me, how vexatious! I can’t quite see. Whoever is that man on Maisie Moffat’s stoep? . . . Oh! Oh!! There now, did n’t I say so?” cried Mrs. Horsley, excitedly triumphant, as she turned to her companion, the Attorney-General for Barotseland’s wife.

“Who is it? Oh, Ada, do tell me,”

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clamoured that lady, craning her neck, and peering out into the darkness.

“Why, Stephen Leslie, of course,” sneered Mrs. Horsley, settling herself back in her seat and smiling.

“*No?*” interrogated the Attorney’s wife, quite ready to be convinced.

“Bah! I always said so, and now here’s the evidence of one’s own eyes—what more do you want?”

“Shocking!” ejaculated the Barotseland lady, who was virtuous and plain, “at this hour, too.”

Mrs. Horsley laughed maliciously, and the seed was sown.

MRS. MAJOR-GENERAL McSWEENEY

“**T**HREE can be no smoke without fire,” remarked Mrs. Major-General McSweeny, severely; and a gentle murmuring chorus, endorsing so astute an observation, arose from a bevy of ladies grouped about the stoep.

It was the McSweeny stoep, and it was Mrs. Major-General McSweeny’s At Home day at her residence on the Suburban Stands.

Mrs. McSweeny, by reason of massive proportions, an emphatic attitude towards the world at large, and the Major-General in particular, also, not unnaturally, in consequence of that gentleman’s substantial banking account, had during a lengthy period held the position of a sort of social leader. But it was no longer so.

Society,—as we understand the term,—when in evidence at all, now had its habitat at Government House, where the real article

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patent to behold was even as a thorn in the flesh to the lady, whose *ne plus ultra* was represented by the gold-encrusted coteries of Johannesburg and the Rand.

Mrs. Major-General McSweeny had therefore, as became the spouse of a warrior, made a strategic movement. She had, in fact, recourse to no less a step than the frequent and now historical one inaugurated, we believe, during the Franco-German War: she did not *retreat*, she “advanced to the rear;” and though in no way abating her thirst for temporal power, Mrs. McSweeny for the nonce threw herself into the arms of the Church.

Here Mrs. McSweeny became an authority on vestments, voluntaries, and all matters ecclesiastical. She swayed the Episcopal See,—she bullied the incumbent and could quell the curates with a glance.

It will therefore be seen that by a tactful rearward movement in the nick of time the Major-General’s lady had “saved the situation” and again become a planet — albeit one of smaller magnitude: an abdicated, but by no means dethroned queen—and as such,

Mrs. Major-General McSweeny

her not very original utterances still bore weight.

The lesser stars gathered about this luminary on the particular Thursday afternoon in question, were Mrs. Horsley and the wife of the Attorney-General for Barotseland, also Mrs. Tibbit, the District Commissioners' wife, and various others of the same genii.

“What’s that I hear about smoke and fire?” queried a sharp little voice; and a masculine figure, not unlike a Middlesex volunteer in khaki, on his way down to Bisley, with a bicycle in tow, hove in sight. It was a local divine.

“Oh, Doctor! how dear of you!” and Mrs. McSweeny fluttered forward, all smiles, while the other ladies beamed deferentially, and Mrs. Tibbit, always practical, watered the teapot.

“Should have been here *ages ago*,” chirped the D.D., who had a way of talking in italics. “Oh, *thanks* — *thanks, very much* — so kind! no *sugar*, *thanks* — and *weak, very weak, please!*” and he took a seat between his hostess and the Attorney-General’s wife, removing his cork helmet, while both ladies

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vied in administering to their Shepherd's carnal wants.

"As I was just saying," resumed the Doctor, jerking out his words between bites of succulent tea-cake, "as I was just saying, I should have been here *ages* ago, only that, passing down Wilson Street, I saw little Mrs. Moffat, looking so *dull*, in fact rather *sad*, all by herself, so I just dropped in for a chat. I wanted to persuade her to come out *here* for a *spin* with me."

There was a perceptible and general "curl up" among the ladies, and the Attorney-General's wife coughed after that manner so calculated to make other people feel uncomfortable. The Major-General's wife only smiled, ever so slightly, but in a lofty and constrained way, and Ada Horsley gave one of those short, sharp treble laughs of which she kept several varieties in stock, whilst most of the other ladies deported themselves after the approved manner of Supers in a Society drama, and Mrs. Tibbit, who prided herself on her presence of mind at all times and under the most trying circumstances, pointedly turned the conversa-

Mrs. Major-General McSweeny

tion by asking the Doctor whether he had fixed the date for the impending Sunday-school treat.

Now the reverend gentleman, with so many disquieting signs flying about, naturally felt, as what man would not, that he had put his foot in it and that it would behoove him in future to step warily. After therefore replying to the District Commissioner's wife, he dived diplomatically into parish matters with Mrs. McSweeny and the Barotseland lady, both such stalwart pillars of the Established Church. Mrs. Tibbit took this opportunity to draw her chair nearer to Mrs. Horsley's, and began:

“ Do tell me, Ada. I came in late, you know, and did n't hear the beginning — when was it? ”

“ Why, last Monday, the night that Maria and I had been dining at Hillside, you know — the night that there was that disgraceful row in Market Square after the prize-fight, when Moffat and young Marshall got locked up.”

“ Oh, yes — yes, of course! You saw them together? ”

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“No” rejoined Ada, rather testily, “he was just leaving: it must have been after eleven —”

“*Leaving Maisie Moffat’s stoep at that hour ! ! !*”

“Exactly! As I said to Maria, it was a mercy for Maisie that no one else saw him!” (N.B. When the Major-General paid surreptitious visits to Mrs. Horsley, she took good care to have the coast clear and see him off the premises herself, whence he picked his way amidst the débris of sardine-tins and broken glass delicately, like King Agag of old.)

“And I wonder how long this had been going on,” exclaimed Mrs. Tibbit, with a craving to be further scandalised.

“Oh, I suspected it ages ago!” (with diplomatic *finesse*.)

“Now you come to speak of it, so did I,” rejoined Mrs. Tibbit, hastily; for she would not be outdone by any of Ada’s assumption of superior knowledge,—surely a Company Official’s wife was as good as a “Limited Liability” man’s, any day!

“He danced with her repeatedly at the

Mrs. Major-General McSweeny

Festivities ball — ” she added, warming to her subject.

“ I know, and he took her in to supper — ”

“ Do you think her pretty ? ” (Seemingly irrelevant, but truly feminine remark.)

“ PRETTY ! ” almost screamed Ada. “ Dear me, no ! ”

“ Nor I — I can’t think what the man sees in her.”

“ Oh, my dear,” with a laugh, “ if a woman is undignified enough to allow a man to pay her such attentions — ”

“ Of course — of course — so wanting in self-respect — ”

“ Well, but, you know, there was that Kimberley affair — ”

“ Yes ; but that *was* Dick, wasn’t it ? ”

“ So they say — ” reluctantly. “ Still,” with an access of cheerfulness, “ that does n’t really make it any better, you know ! ”

“ No, of course not — dear me, no, *certainly not !* ”

“ I think she ought to be shown what we think of her — ”

At this moment Mrs. McSweeny, leaving the eminent Divine and the Attorney-

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General's wife to an interesting tête-à-tête concerning the cut of the new surplices for the choir, joined the gentle creatures thus engaged in the congenial pastime of metaphorically dissecting little Mrs. Moffat.

THE EDITORIAL BOSS

“**T**HE Times! The Times! The Mata-bele Times! and all the daily papers!”

So chants the Muscovite of Hebrew persuasion, as he tears through the town on his bike, like a demon possessed,—leaving long trails of furrows behind him in the ankle-deep dust or mud, according as the season may be wet or dry.

It is a weird and melancholy cry in a minor key, and probably this son of the Steppes has invented it as peculiarly appropriate to the spirit of the surrounding veldt.

The writer of these disjointed papers, however, to whom it has come by force of association to represent the prosaic dressing-bell, indulges in another “forty winks” should neither the cry have resounded, nor the green sheet have been shoved in under the door. Then, after the Kaffir boy has appeared with your tub and you have in a

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resigned spirit investigated such ravages as the white ant may have wrought during the night, you settle down to the morning's skoff and a perusal of the local "daily," gleaning what meagre information you can from three pages of advertisement and one of matter.

Now, a newspaper run by a man you know comes in time to possess a quaintly humorous personality of its own,—especially should you happen to be a contributor and admitted behind the scenes, even into that Holy of Holies THE EDITORIAL SANCTUM,—you have in fact learnt to read between the lines of that paper, and it's the "valet and hero" trick over again, you know! And so it comes to pass that the "LONDON LETTER" from "Our Own Correspondent" appeals to one's risible faculties,—for does not memory conjure up a vision of the Editorial Boss, seated in his shirt-sleeves, by reason of tropical heat, attended by a sable piccanin, who, mounted on a biscuit tin behind the Editorial chair, dislodges with a horse's tail the teasing flies which settle about the Editorial head,

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causing forcible language to flow from the Man of Letters, as with fluent pen he produces this identical "Copy"! Then, if a Saturday, you have the "Ladies' Letter, Sasha to Dodo": "My dearest Dodo! We are in Cairo, or Constantinople, or Clacton on Sea" (curious the way that woman careers about!), "and the hair is worn high," etc. This, of course, you know to be the result of a "Voyage autour de ma chambre" (en Afrique) and the flying visit to the stores in the vicinity of Market Square, with occasional cookery recipes thrown in, — "make-weights" to lengthen the "Copy." But you should see the Editorial Boss swooping down on the luckless journalist who is responsible for this effusion.

"My Letter," demands the Boss, breathlessly — as though he were exclaiming, "Your money or your life!" And having secured feminine twaddle to the extent of half a column, he vanishes — probably to buttonhole the Native Commissioner on the Labour Question, on the Lobola, on this, on that, and on the other, till the N. C.'s mind shows signs of giving way —

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when the eye of the Boss, always on the alert, happens to catch sight of little Horsley of the Matabele Unit Gold Mining Co., Ltd., passing on that nag of his, Swipes, the one he drew in the raffle at the Charter the other night, and he makes for him at a run :

“Hello ! I say, Horsley, you’re the very man I want !” and he whips out his note-book. “Now, let me see — as to the Unit, mine working, eh ?”

“The devil a bit !” grunts Horsley, sur-lily. “Machinery stuck somewhere between Mafeking and Francistown — but don’t you say that, mind. Then there’s no end of a bother about the boys — won’t come in to work. Blast these blooming niggers ! but, look here, don’t you say that, either !”

“Ha ! I see,” murmurs the Boss, scribbling ; then with a cheerful “Right you are” and a nod to the Unit’s manager, he whisks off to interview the Deputy Administrator on that vexed question, the Land-owners’ Occupation Act,—a new Measure, which the land-owning ones are jibbing at and memorialising heaven and earth about.

To-morrow’s mining notes, however, will,

The Editorial Boss

among other items of interesting news, contain an interview with the “genial Manager of the Matabele Unit” in which he was kind enough to unbosom himself to a “Times Man.”

“Well, Mr. Horsley, and are you satisfied with the present state of affairs and the mining prospects of this country?” enquired our representative,—enquiries which set the “genial Manager” off repeating the “Matabele Mining Creed,” in which he avows his firm faith in the country, her mines, and above all, of course, in the Matabele Unit, where work is now in full swing, all the machinery with the exception of the battery, which is on its way out, already in course of erection, including the hauling engine and the air compressors. As to native labour, it was fair, and an output expected about June.

For which *broderie sur la vérité* may Heaven forgive our Boss!

He has in his day “played many parts,” this skipper who sits at the helm and pilots the fortunes of the little green “Matabele.” It was during the rains, when a temporary

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river divided one side of Main Street from the other,—when the waves of an extensive lake lapped the four sides of Market Square, from the centre of which the Market Grill arose like a sea-girt island,—when lagoons and swamps lay scattered here and there, like traps for the unwary, and it behooved him who wished to cross to the other side of the road he was in to go round by three different streets to do it,—when the stoeps resounded to the stamping and scraping of the Boys' mud-caked boots, that one afternoon the Boss hove in sight, jackbooted and dejected.

“What do I scent? Even the fragrant tea! How chaste! How pure!” ejaculated the Boss, his spirits perceptibly rising, as he subsided into the hip-bath, which by day behaves as an arm-chair. After two cups he spouted Heine, three-and-a-half caused him to recite François Coppée, while hot buttered toast made the Boss musical, with the result that he gave the entire last act of “Faust” without a “cut.”

“There now,” sighed this man of many moods, “I feel distinctly better!” and light-

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ing a cigarette, he rose to depart, casually remarking :

“ Probably you think I’m mad. Oh, pray don’t apologise — you know I toured through the Colony with an Opera Company — leading baritone — oh, that was after I’d been night watchman in Cape Town. Then my voice broke — leading baritone nowhere! up a tree, stony broke! So I went and worked in the Kimberley mines — ‘to such vile uses;’ ” and he laughed. “ Do you know I always said I should be Editor of the ‘Times’ one day — and here we are! However it was n’t *this* ‘Times’ I was thinking of then! Well, I must trek — my reporter’s gone into hospital with fever, and three of the comps. are sick, so my work’s cut out for to-night. Let me see — first, there’s the meeting of the Municipal Council. By Jove, I ought to be there now! Oh, you should see the City Fathers go for each other! Distinctly funny that! At 7.30 the Masonic Dinner — 10 sharp, prize-fight between Tully and Lee, must see Ready Money Rodney about that — and then there’s to-morrow’s leader.

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Oh, hang it all ! I sha'n't turn in till morning, till daylight does appear," caroled the Boss. "No rest for the wicked ;" and he fled down the passage warbling :

"And Sally answered, 'Yes, sir, the coachman told me so !'"

On one occasion the Boss had been known to rise and in sheer exuberance of spirits, while the comps. were waiting for "copy," address an after-dinner speech in his best French to the long-suffering sub. across the office table :

"Messieurs, les délégués et chers compatriotes !" began the Boss suavely, with one hand resting on the blotting-pad, and the other gracefully disposed of beneath the tails of an imaginary dress-coat : "c'est avec la plus grande fierté et non sans reconnaissance envers la bonne Fortune qui m'a procuré la distinction de vous adresser ce soir — !"

And there's no knowing how long he might have gone on in the same strain but for the business manager, who burst on the scenes, damp and indignant :

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“ I say — look here, Boss ! what about that leader ? I’m dashed if the whole blooming show is n’t at a standstill while you’re fooling around and talking tommy-rot to the inkstand ! ”

“ All right, my boy, keep your hair on and give me ten minutes,” rejoins the Boss cheerfully, as he sinks into the Editorial chair. “ Let me see ! Oh, here goes ! ” and “ The gathering of the Storm Clouds on the South African Political Horizon,” etc., etc., etc., “ Present rotten state of affairs in the Transvaal,” etc. etc., etc., “ Certain changes must and will take place ere long,” etc., etc., etc., “ Mismanagement and arbitrary proceedings at Pretoria,” etc., runs from the point of the Editorial pen, winding up with polite allusions to “ those countries of the world which proudly point to the British flag as theirs, and which, with the Mother Country, form a United Empire against the attacks of all outside the pale.” Thus in ten minutes the trick is done ; and the Boss, breathing a pious Amen, pushes his “ copy ” through into the printing-room, and sits down with a yawn to await “ proofs ”

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before retiring for what may remain of the night.

“ High pressure,” laughed the Boss, “ I believe you ! ” in answer to some remark to that effect. “ Over three hundred leaders in the year — to say nothing of skooting all over town to hunt up the news — trimming up the bald facts and reconstructing those that policy forbids serving up *au naturel*. And then, after all,” he adds pathetically, and waving his visitor to the only chair warranted to bear up when sat upon, while he perched himself on the side of an up-turned packing-case, — “ after all ‘s said and done and a fellow ‘s pretty well worked his very soul-case out, what do you suppose these Johnnies say ? ‘ Oh, look here ! what ‘s the good of all your high-falutin’ business — we get plenty of that in the Home papers — stow it, and give us more cables — it ‘s cables we pay for and cables we want ! ’ Still, I expect if I *did* leave them without a leader one fine morning, they ‘d jolly soon let me know. I tell you, a fellow gets pretty sick of it all sometimes — But there ! they say it ‘s a long lane that ‘s got no turning ; ”

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and the Boss shied the stump of his cigar at a passing Kaffir, rose and stretched himself.

And so the story of the Editorial Boss is, after all, that of the “square peg in the round hole,” — the man of cultured tastes and keen artistic perceptions doomed by some curious freak of ill fortune to chafe, “cribbed, cabin’d, and confined,” amidst surroundings where the imported spirit of Throgmorton Street and Clapham combined prevail and flourish, where originality is deemed unsafe, and the commonplace loved because understood. Fortunately for the Boss, however, that mental safety-valve, a keen sense of humour and the happy-go-lucky nature of your true Bohemian, keep him going, although probably he is never so happy as when, having manufactured the most startling cables to suit the tastes of his readers, he skoots off on his bike to the veldt, leaving all mundane considerations, such as his creditors, the office, the town, and the red dust, far behind him. There, lying full length among the tall grasses beneath the stunted trees, the Boss, according to the

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mood of the moment, gives himself up to the latest French Yellow Back, or dreams of better times to come — after the output — and it's "Good luck and more power to you, Boss," say we.

TENANTS OF CLAYTONS' ROW

THE Claytons' Store and Canteen stood about half a mile beyond the town — over near the Episcopal church.

Here the brothers Clayton owned a "stand," and upon their chunk of barren veldt, in addition to the profitable tin shanty, which stood hard by the main road, invitingly handy to the thirsty passer-by, they had erected a row of ten rooms known as Claytons' Row.

Elementary enough structures these were, eight feet by ten, with brick floors — convenient to the vagaries of the white ant — with canvas ceilings and a corrugated-iron roof, betwixt which one might occasionally hear stray locusts flapping wildly. They were, at present, guileless of stoep, you did your own furnishing, and for such accommodation as these rooms offered the Messrs. Clayton were in receipt of four pounds ten a month, paid in advance by each of their tenants.

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It is in these outlying districts that the coolies and Malays find ready customers and lay the foundation of small fortunes, while supplying the needy householder's wants at his own door. Hither the despised Banian merchant wends his steps, followed by his Kaffir boy, on whose woolly pate oscillates the "stock,"—loaves, fruit, or maybe farmyard produce from the "coloured" people's location beyond the town.

Midway between the back of Claytons' Store and these desirable residences was the well, whence the various piccanins and "boys" engaged in domestic service drew forth the local water-supply in buckets, by aid of which buckets, also, piccanins would now and then surreptitiously descend (for the weather was hot and sultry), and reappear cackling, while the sparkling drops fell in cascades from off their heads and oily little bodies.

Near here, too, the fires were built,—a three-sided erection of bricks serving to protect each one from the draught. One such "kitchener" would serve for the culinary

Tenants of Claytons' Row

performances of two or three inmates, and about it would squat the attendant piccanins, with three-legged iron pots and "billies" of various sizes, while amidst the warm white wood-ash of a night they and the Kaffir dogs would crawl—to sleep, or maybe eat their mealie mess and suck the bones left over from the Boss's skoff.

It was early spring; the terrific thunderstorms that precede the rainy season had not yet deluged town and veldt, though here and there a local shower had caused the fresh green grass to sprout, softening somewhat the aspect of even Claytons' stand, as well as that of the rolling plain beyond, and laying for the nonce the thick red dust on the road to Sauer's township.

Mrs. Murtock stood in the doorway of room No. 3, with a small fair-haired child clinging to her skirts. Two bigger boys were playing about the rubbish heap; they had "pegged it out," and were now busily engaged in "prospecting" for empty whisky bottles and jam-tins—"black labour" being forthcoming in the shape of one grinning piccanin, while a stray dog had been

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pressed into service "as a mule." Mrs. Murtock was a tall slender woman. She possessed that rarest of qualities, "distinction," and was garbed little better than a charwoman. A white sunbonnet—or "cappie," as colonials call it—shaded a worn sallow face, lined before its time, yet redeemed from plainness by a sweet expression lurking about the eyes and mouth. Within the room stood a zinc bath full of household washing; a stretcher against the wall had, with aid of the ubiquitous Kaffir blanket and sundry cheap pillows, been metamorphosed into an imposing couch. Before it on the packing-case table, covered with shiny white American cloth, stood the remnants of some hybrid meal, in which tea and marmalade seemed to have played the prominent parts. More packing-cases, vainly disguising their identity beneath draperies of "limbo," did duty as wardrobes and larder. A Matabele shield and some assegais interspersed with coloured pictures from the "Graphic" decorated the three walls, upon which traceries of the white ants' spoor were dimly apparent.

Mrs. Murtock, shading her eyes with a

Tenants of Claytons' Row

work-worn hand, gazed across the veldt. The voice of the biggest white child rang out imperiously :

“ Hallo there, buck up, piccanin! — Ikona sebenza — ikona mali !”

“ Ya — ya, piccanin !” echoed the second white imp, “ ikona mali — ikona skoff! is n’t that it, mother? ” and he whacked the little black creature, who only grinned and redoubled his efforts at working the “ low-levels ” of that unspeakable rubbish-heap.

“ See, Colin! there’s dad !” and a smile transfigured the woman’s face, making it beautiful.

Across the veldt with a swinging stride came a man in his best years. Colin, the flaxen-haired baby boy, set out to meet him, and returned in his father’s arms.

“ Oh, Bert, I thought you might have been here at midday,” said the woman, raising her face to be kissed.

“ My dear, it’s too far a cry from the siding here, now that my bike’s a thing of the past,” was the rejoinder. Mrs. Murtock suppressed a sigh, and busied herself at the table :

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“ The children and I had tea some time ago, but I’ve kept something warm for you — here, piccanin, boss up ! Hamba bona lo skoff — kokeele ? ” she inquired of the child, who was peering into the steaming billy.

“ Ya, missis, kokeele,” came the satisfactory response.

“ There now, Bert, it’s awfully nice — *fresh meat* too ! — the remains of that buck Maisie Moffat sent over — and just fancy ! I went to the reckless extravagance of buying *two pounds of potatoes* to-day ! ”

“ You bad woman ! ” replied her husband ; and his laugh resounded from No. 4, where he was removing the signs of the day’s hard work with the aid of a bucketful of water and mottled soap. Mrs. Murtock laughed like a girl ; she did not add that her own “ square feed ” had consisted of bread and cheese with the inevitable tea that accompanies every South African meal. Another minute and Bert Murtock reappeared radiant and ravenous, and Mrs. Murtock, sitting down in the doorway, watched him with the frank satisfaction every rightly con-

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stituted woman feels at the sight of the man of her heart tackling his food with a healthy appetite. Colin stood silently expectant, with an eye to bread and gravy,—contributions he soon succeeded in gorming himself from head to foot with, as only a child can.

“How long will the work last, Bert?” inquired Mrs. Murtock.

“Lord knows! I’m wise enough not to ask. ‘Sufficient unto the day’ for bad news, I’m thinking,” quoth Murtock, as he rose and filled his pipe. “There now, Fan, don’t begin to worry your little head. It has lasted a fortnight longer than I expected, as it is, so who knows but what it may go on indefinitely?” and he put his disengaged arm through his wife’s. But Mrs. Murtock shook her head with a sigh :

“Hardly, dear; they must knock off work when the rains set in” (Murtock, who was an Oxford man, had been lucky enough to get a job in the goods yard at the railway siding), “and—” But she stopped short: she had n’t the heart to bother him when he came home tired,—to tell him that Clayton,

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who “bossed the show,” had intimated he thought it time they paid up that “three quid” owing on last month’s rent; and Fan Murtock turned aside her brimming eyes, so that she did not even see a little feminine figure that just hove in sight.

“Mrs. Murtock! Mrs. Murtock!” it cried, and waved a red sunshade in the air.

“Mrs. Moffat? — oh, Maisie dear, I *am* so glad!” exclaimed poor Mrs. Murtock, thankful for distraction; and at the same moment a jovial “Hullo, Murtock” in the baritone register proclaimed the approach of Thelluson on his wheel from an opposite direction.

“Mrs. Murtock, dear — well, I must n’t sit down for more than a *minute*; indeed I can’t stay, I ’ve got to get Dick’s tea ready by half-past six; the fact is I ’ve come to see if Clayton’s fowls are laying — I know he charges an awful price for his eggs, but I must have a couple. Just fancy, I got half a dozen *guaranteed* ones at nine shillings a dozen on the market the other morning, *guaranteed*, my dear, and would you believe it

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there were only two out of the six I could use for cooking. Piccanin polished off the four 'high' ones with his mealie-pap, and even *he* was sick afterwards."

"I'll send Eric into the store to ask," replied Mrs. Murtock; and she called the bigger boy from his play. "Take Colin with you," she added; and the children went off hand in hand.

"Oh, mother, you've spoilt the game!" grumbled Bob, the second boy. "How *can* I prospect a reef this size all by myself —"

"Nonsense, Bob; Eric will be back in a minute." But Bob, who had been on the verge of a howl, brightened with sudden inspiration, and yelled after his brother:

"Oh! Eric, prospecting awful rot — this reef's no good, wretched 'low-grade' stuff! Let's be lions and skoff the piccanin!" and suiting the action to the words, he fell upon that luckless youngster with tooth and nail and horrible grunts.

Murtock, who had gone forward to meet Thelluson, walked down the road with him, while the latter, dismounting, wheeled his bike. Thus Maisie and Mrs. Murtock,

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left alone, settled themselves in a couple of chairs outside the door and unburdened their minds to each other.

“I don’t know how it is,” said Mrs. Murtock, “but prices don’t seem to come down a bit. It’s worse now there’s a railway than when things came up by road.”

“Most of the storekeepers are grumbling about the delay at the goods-sheds—they say they can’t get their supplies delivered. You should see the cases lying about at the siding; but it’s the usual thing—nobody’s business and nobody’s fault!” replied Maisie.

“Talking of the railway always brings Bert’s work to my mind; God knows how long it may last—it’s the arrears I’m thinking of. Maisie, I could n’t say it to anyone but you, but things are getting fearful with us. If it had n’t been for that game you sent in—” and poor Mrs. Murtock put her handkerchief to her eyes.

“There, there, ‘buck up,’ dear,” rejoined Maisie, with an affectionate squeeze of the hand, “buck up! for look how many of us are in the same boat—and you with a good

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husband and bonnie bairns, you 've got the pull of some ;" and the little woman's voice broke too. " Oh, yes, I know," she continued rapidly, " children have healthy appetites and tear their clothes and are a general nuisance, but oh, Mrs. Murtock, what would n't I give to be you ! Dick 's not been really sober for a day this week ; now his liver 's gone wrong, and his temper with it — and indeed it 's all I can do sometimes not to get up and run away ! How long can he expect to keep his berth ! — and then — " and here Maisie too sought for her handkerchief.

At this juncture distraction came in the form of a horsewoman. It happened to be Ada Horsley.

" How-do, Mrs. Murtock ? I 've come to call on you ! " she exclaimed in the highest treble she kept for " nobodies in particular ;" and reining up in the region of the rubbish heap, Ada sprang off, while throwing her reins over one arm, and gathering up the skirts of her smart khaki habit with the other, she proceeded to pick her way daintily amidst the general débris.

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“*Mrs. Moffat?*” she exclaimed with a slight flush and elevation of the eyebrows, and stood irresolute.

“Don’t go,” hastily whispered Mrs. Murtock to Maisie, while a welcome interruption was caused by the reappearance of Eric with the new-laid eggs. Behind him loitered Colin, cuddling something drab and round in his chubby arms.

Eric in breathless agitation :

“Oh, mother! Colin’s been and found that skull again!”

“Colin, put it down this instant,” commanded his mother.

“Me love it,” murmured Colin; “boohoo!” breaking off in yells after a fruitless struggle in which Mrs. Murtock came off victorious, and Master Colin was led away weeping to be pacified by his brothers and the piccanin, leaving the hideous grinning thing to be removed by a black boy.

“Whatever skull is it?” asked Maisie Moffat.

“I really don’t know,” replied Mrs. Murtock. “Bert says it’s a Kaffir skull by the shape — he’s pitched it away more than

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once, but Colin will find it and again bring it back."

"Probably a relic of those niggers who were strung up on that tree in Fife Street," remarked Mrs. Horsley, carelessly. "There used to be a lot of bones knocking about." Maisie rose with a shudder and collected her traps.

"Don't go, dear," repeated Mrs. Murtock.

"I'm sorry, but I must now,—I'm late as it is;" and with a slight nod to Ada, Mrs. Moffat proceeded across the veldt in the direction of her home in Wilson Street.

"How *can* you receive that woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Horsley, almost before Maisie was out of ear-shot.

"What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Murtock, with that certain *hauteur* she knew how to assume when necessary. "Maisie Moffat is my *friend*, you seem to forget." Ada bit her lip.

"Well, Mrs. Murtock, I can only say I think you are very unwise," she returned lamely; but Ada felt she had met her match, and what's more made a wrong move. "What I really came about was the Church

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bazaar," she began volubly, and hitching her horse's bridle up to the Murtocks' door and slipping into the chair Maisie had vacated; and while Mrs. Murtock listened, politely bored, the two men, who had turned back, came slowly walking up the road deep in conversation.

"I can't make up my mind one way or the other," remarked Murtock, in reply to some observation of Thelluson's, "but hang on we must, somehow. I can't chuck the thing now—it's too late. Every rap I and Fan—poor girl—have got, we sank in this place before the rebellion."

"Then as soon as there's a ghost of a chance, I should sell out. You will get something, though never what you gave; the value put on stands up here was always fictitious. I should advise you to sell," said Thelluson.

"Would you really, though?" returned the other man, almost wistfully.

"I would," remarked Thelluson, "but *you won't*—I know that! It's the way with all you fellows who have been up any time—"

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“I know, I know,” broke in Murtock, hastily ; “you mean we get paralysed — in a way — and lose our power of action — of independent thought.” Thelluson nodded. “We’ve thrown in our lot and seem to feel we’ve got to make common cause with the concern, eh ?” Thelluson nodded again. “Well, now, there’s Horsley who says — ” But this was more than Thelluson could stand:

“ My dear chap ! say anything *you* like, but for Heaven’s sake, spare me what Horsley says ! How can anyone short of a blithering idiot — you’ll excuse my strong language — how can anyone short of a d——d fool take the tall talk of Horsley or any of that crowd for anything but ‘bunkum’ ? I don’t say they’ve not got a perfect right to say it and a great deal more if they choose, — men don’t draw their pay in four, aye, more likely five figures for nothing, but what I say is this : if you want to get at the truth of things, you’d better go to the bottom of the ladder for enlightenment and not to the top ; ” and Thelluson drew forth a cigar, lit it, and took up the parable once more.

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“Did n’t I come up not long after the Rand boom, and don’t I know something of Australian and Californian mining, let alone the Transvaal? I did n’t put in two years on the Laming Flats for nothing, nor elsewhere either, you bet! Did n’t I make my own observations and draw my own conclusions and go away again? And then I returned just about the time of the railway opening, for I said to myself, Who knows! the whole show’s a surprise packet, but —” and Thelluson shrugged his shoulders expressively. Murtock strode on uneasy, but unconvinced.

“How do you manage to find out these things, Thelluson? I’m dashed if I can!”

“My good fellow, when I think it’s time I knew something more, I go out on to the veldt and I make a fire, and what is more, I uncork a whiskey bottle —” Murtock laughed — “then they come,” continued Thelluson, “first one and then another, and we sit over that fire together and talk.”

“But do those men tell you the truth?” queried Murtock.

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“Perhaps not always,” rejoined Thelluson, meditatively stroking his beard. “The truth is precious — it is not to be lightly wasted, but *sometimes* it slips out unawares. From personal observation I should say that a man generally starts by lying and ends by telling the truth from sheer weariness — there is a bed-rock even to fabrication.”

They had nearly reached the Murtocks’ rooms by now. Mrs. Horsley, who always felt ill at ease in Thelluson’s presence, rose to depart. Murtock held her stirrup, and Ada vaulted lightly into the saddle.

“Then I can’t persuade you, Mrs. Murtock dear, to give us — say — one afternoon? *Everyone* will be there, and I’m having the caps and aprons for our refreshment stall up from Cape Town — they’re simply sweet!”

“It’s very good of you, Mrs. Horsley,” returned Mrs. Murtock, “but it’s really impossible, my time’s so much taken up as it is.”

“I *am* so disappointed — Oh, thanks!” this to Mr. Murtock as he handed her the reins. “Well, ta-ta! then ;” and Ada, turn-

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ing her horse, set off at a sharp trot across the veldt towards Market Square and the Suburban Stands.

“ How I hate that woman ! ” exclaimed Thelluson ; and the energy with which he relieved himself of this remark caused the Murtocks to laugh outright.

A SAMPLE OF ANOTHER SORT

THREE once was a gentleman who started a weekly society paper, but holding the belief—and very wisely too—that man shall not live by journalism alone, he combined his loftier avocation with the lowlier, albeit more profitable, one of a pawnbroker, and to this again, being a many-sided individual, he allied the calling of a repairer of bicycles.

Now, Hiram Goldstein—for this was the gentleman's name, and one which at a pinch he altered to suit the exigencies of the moment—had come up to the siding near the goods-yard in a third-class compartment amongst the Kaffirs, soon after the line was opened up. When asked where he came from last, Hiram was wont to be evasive; yet men had seen Hiram Goldstein in divers places, not only in the Transvaal but also in Natal and the Colony, and under varying and even unique circumstances.

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But then, what of that? Might not Hiram's memory be quite as inconveniently accurate? Is n't it far better to let bygones be bygones, and say :

“ Why, Hiram, my boy ! come up for the Boom ? Well, you 're in plenty of time — *plenty* of time — though waiting for *that* won't buy the baby a new frock, as the saying is. But 'let them *all* come' — the more the merrier — for it 's a poor heart that never rejoices. So here 's to *you*, Hiram, old chap — chin-chin ! ” Thus would the Gentle toast and regale Hiram Goldstein, taking him as it were to his bosom, the while Hiram would read between the lines somewhat as follows :

“ I say, Hiram, for the Lord 's sake not a word about that little affair on the Rand or again up at Kimberley ; 'mum ' 's the word, Hiram.” And Hiram would smile an oily little smile and close his beady eyes and drink with the men — when they treated him — but not *too much*. And then, when they brought him their miscellaneous goods, even down to their revolvers and razors, Hiram would give them the lowest amount

A Sample of another Sort

he possibly could, combining with it the highest rate of interest, for had he not been very kind to them? Might not a word from Hiram Goldstein — one word in that horrid little paper of his, which, though it could n't pay as a paper, was yet the weapon with which Hiram could bring his friends to heel — might not such a word set folks enquiring? Further afield, of course, for who would be mug enough to believe Hiram, even on his oath !

So Hiram, as the time wore on, saw the shekels rolling in. Storekeepers gave the paper their "ads ;" and what's more, paid for them, for they knew his nasty tongue. He filched what he could in the way of social doings from the "dailies," and dressed them up in a sauce of greasy urbanity, with a wagging of the tail and a fawning at the feet of the Suburban Stands, those seats of the mighty which lay across the small river with the long, unpronounceable name.

Then, when Hiram would meet Horsley trotting up to the Club on Swipes, off would go his cow-boy hat, aye, till it

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swept the very dust in Main Street, after which Hiram would step inside the Charter bar and suck up the latest '*on dit*' about Mrs. Horsley or some other woman, and then depart to incorporate the savoury information in a quaint column of questions all men about town were sure to possess the key to. Ready cash, too,—for bike repairs had been a frequent source of income to our friend, Hiram having been the first to undertake these jobs. He had been engaged in this kind of work before in a town in the Transvaal, until cupidity had prompted him, so rumour hath it, to cross into British territory one fine day on a Humber not his own, and bearing with him as nest egg and souvenir his late employer's cash-box; and for some time Heaven prospered Hiram, then a change set in, and it happened in this way:

One morning Hiram Goldstein was opening his "office"—that tin shanty not far from Charlie Maddock's place, over which he had with so much pride inscribed the legend, "Editorial Offices of the SCREECHER, sole proprietor Hiram

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Goldstein, Premier Pawnbroker, and Pioneer Repairer of punctures, etc., ”—when his eye was met by a flaring placard over against the east side of Market Square, which announced that Sandy MacDougal “fra’ Aberdeen” (though more recently from Mafeking) had set up *his* workshop there, and “invited the nobility and gentry” to bring their punctured bikes to him.

Now, as long as Hiram had been alone in his glory, the Boys from the Companies’ Offices and the ladies from the Suburban Stands — every individual, in fact, who owned a wheel, and they were many — had had to take their stricken bikes to Hiram, and handsomely they paid him too for his ministrations ; and if they found they could not pay, then Hiram kept that bike, and of such in his back shop he had many. Yet not infrequently a murmur would arise that after Hiram had mended it in one place, it promptly broke down in another that never had anything wrong with it before, and so it came to pass that, with a rival in the field, it was not long be-

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fore Hiram's trade waned, and he bit his nails with rage to see them skooting past his door to stop at Sandy's — for Sandy's work was good and his prices low — and seeing they got their money's worth, the Boys did n't mind treating Sandy, who loved "a wee drappie." Thus Sandy, working with a will from morn till night, would of an evening stroll up smiling and hang about the stoep of the Maxim, waiting for an invitation — for it would have been a sin to let his own hard-earned money go to fill a Licensed Victualler's till : "I am but a puir mon, an' I dinna hold wi' sinful waste," he'd say; yet after a bout like on "Bobbie Burns's Nicht," when wakening from that sound slumber into which he had sunk after his friends had escorted him home, still hiccuping "Scots wha hae" even as they rolled him on to his stretcher — Sandy's first conscious thought was one of pious thankfulness for blessings received : "Eh, laddie! but I wa' full — an' ne'er so much as a saxpence o' me own guid siller! and yet so full o' the crayter that I could na' verra weel stan' uprecht!" and Sandy, beaming with a mixed

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memory of that joyful time, would work away with redoubled energy, giving his customers such satisfaction that his clientèle increased with leaps and bounds.

Meanwhile Hiram, whose paper had shut up, because a man came round with a sjam-bock, and said if he did n't retract some of his innuendoes he 'd give him such a hiding as he, Hiram, had never yet had in all his born days — and because if he did n't hint these things, how should his paper flourish ? Hiram, through whose hands from time to time had passed about all the Boys and others had to pawn in the way of portable property, and with whom many of these things had remained by reason of the friends he had " obliged " either going down the line and crossing the frontier at D'Aar in a hurry, or being unable to pay interest let alone redeem their various treasures, — Hiram, bereft of trade, his SCREECHER foully slain, saw himself confronted with an ugly situation, and set his wits to work out a new combination. Now two small rooms had formed Hiram's premises; within one Hiram had repaired his bikes as well as con-

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ducted the business connected with his paper, — now no more, — while in the other he had stored those unclaimed articles, many and various, which it had been his monthly pleasure to sell by auction on the Market Square. But now times were so bad that Hiram's "little lot" often hung fire for want of bidders, for who but the coloured people had any ready money? Besides this, the white ants were working their way through — only the other day he had found a pair of dress pumps he had given a man five shillings on, with the soles almost eaten off when he looked at them two days later. Such clean loss as this could not be tolerated. Such, then, was Hiram's financial position when he emerged one evening from his premises on Market Square, and turning the key in both doors, told the Kaffir not to come back that night, and cheerfully whistling prepared to go for a spin by moonlight as far as the "Welsh Harp."

There was a Smoker on at the "Welsh Harp" that night — never had Hiram, in spite of recent reverses, been in such buoyant spirits, cracking jokes with the best of

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them, even losing a game of billiards to young Marshall, who had once called him “a dirty little Jew.” Then, as the night wore on, such of them as could still mount their machines hied them back to town.

“Whatever’s that crowd round about Hiram’s place!” cried the fellow in front. Hiram, who was close behind, said nothing, but smiled as he peered ahead. Yes, assuredly there was a crowd — so far so good — his plan had succeeded! Ah no, alas for Hiram Goldstein, not quite! — he tried to turn and double back when he saw his failure; but Inspector Smith and a few others were too quick for him, and in a minute someone had him by the scruff of the neck.

“Here, Hiram, my boy, you’ll have to account for this!”

“For what?” inquired Hiram, trying to brazen it out, but with his teeth chattering.

“For getting in four gallons of the best paraffin from Meikle Bros. and then spilling it on the floor and messing it up the walls and rubbing it in generally all over the place. Got your insurance papers?” and the burly Inspector groped familiarly in

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the luckless Hiram's pockets, while the crowd chuckled :

“ Thought so ! He has got them on him ! ” remarked the Inspector, with a smile. “ There now, come along, you little beast ! Are n’t you ashamed of yourself, bringing the Chief of the Fire Brigade and all the men out for a measly blaze like that ? Next time you ’re on this job, Hiram, you ’ll do it more thoroughly, I ’ll be bound ! Now off you go, quick march — ! ”

And so Hiram was escorted by a cheerful contingent of loafers to the lock-up.

It was in vain the next day that Hiram said the thing that was not. He had to do his “ little bit ” for arson, and on being discharged, left the town. He has, however, we are in a position to relate, evidently regained the confidence of the public, for he now occupies the post of Editor to a Financial Paper somewhere in the Colony.

A NIGHT'S ACQUAINTANCE

LITTLE Miss Grant (who it may at once be said was no one in particular, and need not therefore awaken any lively interest in the reader's mind) had turned over in her bed for quite the twentieth time in the vain hope of sleeping.

The hotel bar had ostensibly closed — for it was past midnight — but the balls of the billiard-room alongside kept up an irritating “click,” and the voice of Tim, the billiard marker, as well as those of Stephen Leslie, young Marshall, and others, arose from time to time in wordy dispute.

“What the bl—y h—n, d’ ye mean by that?” and there was a scuffle, during which time little Miss Grant, who was nervous, hid her head under the bedclothes and “wished they would n’t.”

Then there was a lull again, only broken by the “too-tooing” of the mail-coach horn as Zeederberg’s mules romped past with

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their customary final dash, making for the office and stables in Main Street. Another lull, and the “click” of the billiard balls and the voices of the men were gradually becoming more and more indistinct and mixed up, when a loud knocking at the bedroom door aroused the would-be sleeper into wakefulness once more.

Rat-tat-tat-tat! and then :

“Where’s Jane, I’d like to know! It’s the Cape-girl’s business this!” It was the voluble voice of Mrs. Page, the house-keeper, who continued in more reassuring tones :

“Miss Grant — now don’t be frightened, there’s a dear! but I want that second bed — it’s a young lady come by the Gwelo Coach — dragging one out of bed to do a half-caste’s work at this time of night.”

Here the occupant of this double-bedded cell opened the door, and Mrs. Page, in curl-papers, dressing-gown, and slippers, directed her flow of conversation to the Kaffir boy who bore the traveller’s luggage :

“Panze lappa — like a good boy. Ikona *lappa*, you idiot! — Now, my dear, there *are*

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sheets on the bed — so I 'll wish you a good-night!" — this to the new arrival, who now came into the room ; and slamming the door, Mrs. Page departed muttering, to resume her broken slumbers.

One guttering candle illumined the small square room, with its narrow iron bedsteads, its one painted washstand with its enamelled ware, and the deal corner shelf with the cretonne curtain which represented the "hanging wardrobe."

The girl, for she seemed young, had begun to divest herself of her garments. Little Miss Grant, from her recumbent position, looked at her new room-mate, and the girl returned her look with a broad smile.

"Living here, eh?" she enquired familiarly, throwing her clothes wherever came handy.

"No — at least I 'm leaving to-morrow."

"Leaving, are you? — where are you going to?"

"To the Rand — I prefer it."

The girl took no notice of the answer, but continued :

"My word! just look at these things!"

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holding up a hat and skirt,—“the dust on the Gwelo road’s like going through a snow-storm;” and she began a vigorous shaking, with a cheerful disregard for her companion’s discomfort.

She could be better seen now: a young woman of twenty-four or thereabouts, with a pink and white complexion that would coarsen in another five years, a coil of dark hair which strayed in stringy wisps about a flat forehead, dark eyes, a nondescript nose, a full red mouth with strong white teeth, and a lower lip that bulged,—altogether rather a brutish type, yet not “ill-favoured.”

Little Miss Grant, looking up and taking stock of the girl thus energetically scattering the red road dust over every article in the room, called to mind having seen similar faces at Home,—principally about the corners of streets towards nightfall, or at cheap sea-side resorts on Bank Holidays.

“Have you come out from Home?” she hazarded.

“Yes, last year—came out as Mother’s help to a lady in Cape Town—Lor’ bless you! I did n’t stick that long!” Here

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she blew out the candle and plunged into bed.

“There was a fellow—a gentleman friend I used to meet at Dix’s tea-rooms—you know Dix’s tea-rooms?” Little Miss Grant signified that she did; and her unknown acquaintance, who was evidently inclined to be loquacious, continued:

“Well, he found me a berth as house-keeper to a store on the Salisbury road.”

“That was a long way from the Cape, was n’t it?” remarked her companion.

“Well, you see, it was this way—one night I was at Dix’s with my gentleman friend, when who should turn up at the very next table but the lady whose kids I was minding—she and their father? Well, I don’t mind telling you they gave it me hot and strong next morning, and then and there I left, for I was n’t going to be spoken to like dirt, I can tell you—I hope I know what’s due to me, I do! So, as he, my gentleman, happened to have business in Kimberley,—he was a diamond-buyer, he was, a little Jew chap with no end of “mali,” as they say out here,—he took me

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along with him, and a rattling time we had there too ; ” and the young lady laughed at the memory of those joyous days passed in the company of the chivalrous Hebrew dealer in precious stones.

Little Miss Grant sat up in bed, and peered with fascinated eyes through the darkness over to where her companion lay. She knew these things were ; but her own life’s path had not lain that way, and she listened with rapt and breathless interest, for she had always imagined that the people these things happened to were either marvellously beautiful or possessed of some powerful fascination, yet assuredly the heroine in question was neither.

“ And then ? ” she queried eagerly.

“ Then — why, I went up to the store. Mike Delany was the boss, and he wanted a white lady as a sort of ‘ draw,’ you know. Lor’ ! there was n’t much ‘ housekeeping,’ so to speak ! I bossed around, and the Kaffirs did the real work. Mike only gave me ten pounds a month, but, bless you, I trebled it with tips and things from the chaps in the Mounted Police — for we

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were close to Marandella's, you know — and from the coach passengers, for you see Mike's store was a sort of half-way house and hotel, and we could sleep ten at a pinch in the huts — though we were short of blankets."

"I see, that must have been awfully interesting, and I suppose you're going back?"

"Well — n-o," hesitatingly ; "you see, it's like this. Mike sort of took to me — and well he might ! for I must have doubled his bar custom. Then he wanted me to marry him — he said he did n't know when he'd liked a girl so much — and the long and short of it was he wanted to settle down. He'd come into the country along with the first lot; so being what they called a pioneer, they gave him a farm somewhere or other — and he pegged out some claims — so we got engaged — "

"Oh," broke in little Miss Grant, breathlessly, "how nice!"

There was no answer, only a queer sound from the opposite bed, and then the voice went on. "Well, you see, it might

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have been all right — only I 've been and got into a bit of trouble with — with — someone else — ”

“ Oh, oh ! ” gasped the listener. There was a silence which the stranger was the first to break, for she turned over in bed, gave a half-hysterical sob, blew her nose, and resumed with unabated vivacity :

“ Not that it matters, *really*, for he — I mean the gentleman — has acted very handsomely — Mike put it to him, you know, that it was the least thing he could do — ”

“ Then you cared *most* for him, did n't you ? ” urged little Miss Grant, anxious to administer comfort to one in sore distress, and at the same time put the best solution on the matter.

“ Oh, no ! ” was the cheerful rejoinder : “ I don't really care for either of them — ” then languishingly, “ the man I *simply love* is the Native Commissioner ! ”

At this point little Miss Grant felt her brain reel.

“ Good-night,” murmured the occupant of the other bed, sleepily.

A Night's Acquaintance

“Good-night,” faintly echoed her companion ; and silence reigned.

It was still dark when little Miss Grant arose to dress for her journey. She lit the candle and shaded its light from the sleeping figure on the other bed.

The girl lay on her back, with her coarse, unlovely tangle of hair spread across the pillow,— her full red lips parted in a smile of perfect repose. There was a gleam of white breasts heaving gently below their loose covering, two strong arms formed a curve above her ; she had kicked the blankets aside, while from under the thin cotton sheet one foot with flat instep and clumsy ankle protruded gracelessly. A physically robust, yet unwholesome animal,— the embodiment of what we are told is a Necessary Evil,— yet lacking, even in this moment of unconscious *abandon*, the veriest spark of “seduc-tive grace.”

The girl did not waken, and so little Miss Grant slipped out noiselessly, and the two women never met again. Only it so chanced that three months later saw little

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Miss Grant once more back in the same room, and, memory reviving, she made enquiry of Mrs. Page.

“What has become of the young lady who shared my room that night?”

“Become of her, my dear? Why, it would take a week to tell!”

“Whatever did she do?” exclaimed little Miss Grant, suspecting at least suicide by reason of the frail one’s passion for the Native Commissioner.

“Do? Why, she only stayed three days, made a dead set at every man who crossed the threshold — and who didn’t, for that matter — and then bolted down to Durban with Stephen Leslie.”

“Oh! but I thought Mr. Leslie was engaged to a nice girl in Port Elizabeth?” faintly enquired Miss Grant.

“Only one, my dear?” and Mrs. Page lifted up her voice and laughed oracularly, whilst little Miss Grant said nothing, but pondered these things in her heart.

ISRAELS, IMPRESARIO; OR, THE FOLLOWERS OF THESPIS

ZEEDEMBERG'S coach was floundering up to the Selukwe, bearing within its recesses and upon its ample roof all that remained of "The Grand International Opera Company," which, touring under the sole management of Samuel Aaron Israels, Esq., was advertised in the bills to contain "stars" of the first magnitude, a "powerful chorus and picked orchestra," "realistic and unrivalled scenery," together with "rich and marvellous costumes."

It is not our province nor our intention to contradict Samuel A. Israels, but only to casually observe that whatever the strength of the artistic contingent this enterprising Impresario had started his "Great and Unique African Tour" with, it would seem by degrees to have grown beautifully less. Showers of stars must have fallen somewhere, and that realistic scenery have been

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hired out to fill up and embellish the waste and dread monotony of arid sun-baked veldt. *Something* assuredly must have happened to account for the troop of six or seven weary travel-stained mortals the red-bodied coach disgorged on its arrival at the Tebekwe. Not that our friends had got to the end of their journey even now, oh dear no ! They were “billed” to open that night somewhere between the Bonsor and Balaclava — but the coach, you see, went no further.

From the Tebekwe to the Bonsor huts is a good three-mile walk — as the crow flies — more or less. It is, moreover, all up and down hill, and the day was hot. The “Company” accepted the situation according to their various temperaments. Israels swore and blustered, throwing about his little arms and stamping his little legs: “Zeederberg should pay for this ! Damn him, that he should, and Israels would summons him, and have him fined for breach of contract and serious delay — blank ! blank !! blank !!!”

The Prima Donna — a fine woman, but arrived at that time of life when the femi-

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nine figure "spreads" — with a pouting face of dairymaid prettiness beneath a cart-wheel hat of alarming circumference, wept helplessly, refusing to be comforted, even by the *chef d'orchestre*, or, one should say, the orchestra itself, — for it was now he alone who represented every instrument of that "picked band" (now long disbanded), Tony, the man of parts, — genius freakishly disguised in a queer ungainly body, with a tender heart and open hand, and love of the whiskey bottle.

Then there was Percival Markham, B.A., — we never got at the rights of *that* — but he hailed from Australia, and had, each time he mentioned his "honours," graduated at a different University. Percival Markham, B.A., was a tragedian of the "heavy" order and of Transpontine experience. When he "took the stage," he took the centre, and kept it, while, so far as any continuity of the play was concerned, all the other characters might as well have stood in the wings and shouted their parts from there. Markham favoured "one-man" plays, — with Markham as that man, — and why he

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had elected to tour as leading baritone in Grand Opera, being without that primary necessity, a voice, no one but himself could explain. Yet none could have been more assiduous in giving valuable "little hints" to others, or pointing out the way in which they persistently would spoil a "certain effect."

"You need n't trouble about me, Markham, d' you hear?" Pringle, the *jeune premier* (or whatever else might be wanted) of the Company would growl.

"No trouble whatever, my dear boy!" Markham would murmur with gentle deprecation,— "no trouble whatever. We veterans of the stage should never shirk the duties our vast experience imposes on us. I well remember the day when Henry Irving came up, and with tears in his eyes said, 'Markham, my dear fellow—'" But what Sir Henry's words on this memorable occasion were have ever remained a matter of conjecture, for by the time the "Heavy Lead" had reached this point in his narrative, every member of the Company present had invariably retired in hot haste.

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Pringle, the *jeune premier*, who in his day (he was now only twenty-three) had played many parts, was a youth of dauntless courage. In all matters appertaining to the Dramatic Art, Pringle stepped in “where angels feared to tread,”—assuming the rôle of Faust, Lohengrin, Nanki Pooh, or the Silver King with the same intrepid zeal. He had, previously to adopting the stage as his calling, filled two other positions, that of usher in a school at Home, and later, that of clerk to a stockbroker in Johannesburg. It was while occupying the latter berth and in the Golden City of the Rand, that Montague Pringle’s heart had succumbed to the charms of Millicent de Vere, the soubrette then “starring” at the Empire; and throwing £25 a month to the winds, young Pringle started with a light heart and all the elasticity of youth to scale the ladder of Theatrical Fame at a run.

The Company as above mentioned, with the addition of Giles, the Property man and universal buffer, and minus those ladies and gentlemen of the chorus who figured so largely in the bills, was at present despon-

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dently grouped about the door of Meikle Bros.' store.

Being a week-day and early in the afternoon, but few men were about. A passing prospector or two, having stopped to outspan his Cape cart and dine at the store, strolled up and stared at the women.

The *Prima Donna*, with reddened eye and pouting lip, sat on the stoep, flicking the dust from the trimmings of her picture hat. Miss de Vere, the soubrette, had retired into a corner, where with a mirror the size of half a crown, white chalk, and wash-leather, she sought to repair the damages which the journey had wrought on her complexion. Around the bar Israels, Markham, Pringle, and Giles had foregathered, seeking to lay the dust within.

“Israels, my dear fellow, we all look to you,” began the urbane Markham —

“It’s yourself you’d better look to — for you’ll have to foot it every step of the way, I tell you!” retorted Israels, brusquely.

“But I say, Israels, what about the ladies —” ventured the gallant Pringle.

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“Damn the ladies!” promptly ejaculated the Impresario.

They all knew S. A. Israels, and consequently left him alone, while he, dancing hither and thither like a parched pea “commandeering” Kaffirs at princely rates he never meant to pay, ordered and marshalled the members of his company and his niggers after the manner of a field-marshall departing to the front.

It was a queer crew that set out on the three-mile tramp that hot afternoon. Motley soldiers of Fortune, who having enlisted under Israels’ Dramatic Flag, remained there for want of “treasury,” following in Israels’ erratic footsteps for the sake of their daily bread: *that* was where they “had him”! — he had to pay their hotel bills (bar the “drinks”), and this was where he “had them” too, for they had to do their “mumming” and keep the show alive for the sake of their keep. For if the worm turned — or “cut up rusty,” as foolish worms had been known to do — the devil a sign need they ever hope to see of overdue salaries. Israels had a most convincing

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way on these occasions of demonstrating that not only had every penny been forestalled, but that the luckless mummer was in debt and deeply beholden to the large-hearted generosity of Samuel A. Israels, Esq.

Thus the contingent that struggled listlessly down the first incline leading from the Tebekwe huts was none of the cheerallest. In front rode Israels, who bestrode a mule ; about him, bearing properties and wardrobes generally, marched the Kaffir boys, clad according to their wont in anything from the simplicity of a latch-key and string of beads to discarded regimentals. Giles, Israels' hard-worked lieutenant, was near at hand, ready with perspiring brow to do his chief's behest.

“Giles ! Giles ! damn it ! where’s that ‘set piece’ for the interior of the Sultan’s Palace ? and what’s that ? Wigs and tights, eh ? — Hold the branch of that tree aside will you — you ass — or we’ll have the ‘drop scene’ ripped across the centre — Tell Pringle to come here — Can’t you see him ? — then look for him — ! Bring him here, the lazy young brute ! Mashing Miss

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de Vere, I'll be bound — Of course, didn't I say so?" and Israels, rising in his stirrups, gazed behind at his followers. "Here, Pringle, drop that — Markham will see to the ladies! You and Tony just hoist the make-up boxes on to this black brute's head — My word, if this won't melt grease-paint!" and he mopped his heated brow.

And so the cavalcade strayed on in single file, up and down the Kaffir paths which intersect the little wooded kopjes, in and out among the underwood and tangle of bright flowers and thorny bush that in their rank profusion overgrow the ways through the Selukwe. On and on, across the rippling streams, past tiny splashing falls, with the sound of many waters in the sultry air, with the bright-eyed lizards and changing chameleons basking on the scorching lumps of quartz outcrops, scaring here and there a shy rock rabbit or a timid buck, — on and on they toiled, while the men cursed and growled and the women sulked and fretted, with never a one that cared a jot, or felt his heart the lighter for this gay wealth of

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boundless freedom,— for kopjes, trees, or flowers, or above all, for the sunshine,— sunshine that wrapped, caressed, filled, brightened all around, creeping beneath and warming with its kiss even the dark-brown earth beneath those leafy tangles whither no foot could reach.

The Balaclava store and hotel stand on either side of the road that leads to the Bonsor. Around both may be seen the usual complement of Kaffir huts, which constitute the sleeping accommodation; and about the canteen on this particular day hung the storekeeper, the proprietor of the bar, and a man from the Mounted Police, sent up from the nearest camp to see to a break-down on the telegraph line.

A small Kaffir, 'twixt sandwich boards made from two lids of Dewar's whiskey packing-cases, proclaimed to the world at large a flaming announcement of the immediate arrival of Israels' "Grand International Opera Company," on its "first visit to the Selukwe Gold Belt."

"I say, what's this? Hi, stand still, will you?" cried the M. P., coming outside

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and catching sight of the boy as he perambulated the enclosure in and out among the piglets and small Matabele hens, bearing that flaring announcement upon his breast and back,—just the job to suit a Kaffir. The boy paused, and turned a grinning front to the white men.

“Israels’, by all that’s holy!” exclaimed the youngster, and roared.

“Yes, he’s taken the old club-room for the night,” observed Raynor, the man who ran the canteen; “and what’s more, I’ve got to put the whole darned crew up in the huts — five men and two ladies! I suppose the women are used to roughing it a bit — for I’ve not got stretchers enough to go round, and,” nodding at the storekeeper, “Masters and I can’t muster as much as a pair of sheets between us.”

“There ain’t much of them left,” observed the young Mounted Policeman, as he perused the sandwich-board.

“Tottie de la Rue, otherwise Mrs. Israels: fine and large, that lot! — then Miss de Vere — m’yum, m’yum! — and Pringle — why, last time I was down country they’d got

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him in trunk for punching young Marshall's head — or, let me see, was it Leslie's? I 'm hanged if I know, for I was a bit mixed that night myself, but he punched *somebody's* all along of that de Vere girl — Israels had to bail him out because the blooming show would have had to 'hang up' without him. Lord! what a wax Samuel I. was in — " and at this moment the Impresario appeared in person on the crest of the road, booted and spurred and aboard a "jaded steed," like the hero of an opening chapter in a novel of J. P. R. James', — even down to the scenic effect of a "dying sun touching the western horizon."

Raynor, the canteen man, strolled up ; Israels scrambled off his sorry mule ; the dusty, perspiring, bedraggled "Remnant" straggled into the enclosure, and there was a certain amount of stir and bustle about the Balaclava huts.

The gallant M. P. called for claret and lemonade for the ladies, and something stronger for the men ; for being early in the month, he was still comparatively flush.

"What 's the booking, Raynor — full

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house, eh?" squeaked Israels, bustling up, full of importance ; and even as he spoke a storm that had been lowering for the last few hours among the hills, broke overhead, and in ten minutes the road between the store and the canteen was almost impassable. Within the hut that served as a dining-room sat the ladies de la Rue and de Vere, damp and dismal. Weak patches in the grass roof were giving way, and through these trickled little streams of rain, soaking the dingy table-cloth and adding to the general moisture of things.

Without, beneath a shelter built of biscuit tins and tarpaulin, the Madagascar "chef" and a Kaffir boy were busy at work concocting some savoury mess. Markham had already buttonholed the storekeeper, and was telling him that story about himself and Sir Henry Irving ; Pringle and the M. P. were waxing confidential over drinks in the bar ; while Giles, Tony, and the Impresario were wading over to take a survey of the Opera-house.

"And now, my dear fellow, what should you say we 'll open to to-night?" concluded

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Markham, gazing up benignly at the pelting rain, after having endeavoured to impress upon Masters, the storekeeper, that he, Markham, was solely travelling for pleasure, having joined in with Israels from sheer exuberance of spirits, and “for the lark of the thing, don’t you know.”

“Open to? Oh, to one man of the Mounted Police, I should say—and he’s here,” remarked the storekeeper, drily. Then the wind changed, and drove the drenching rain right in under the stoep; so both men retreated, and “joined the ladies.”

The Madagascar “chef,” having achieved his culinary task under circumstances such as would have daunted any ordinary cook, had placed a dish of steaming curry and rice and tinned tomatoes on the table. A Kaffir shambled in with tea, condensed milk, and divers condiments, for their hosts had drawn to the utmost on their supplies, both in store and canteen.

“Though the whole blasted show’s more trouble than it’s worth,” remarked Raynor; “it’s *the women*, don’t you know! Lord, it does me good to see a white girl! and

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— well, the fellows from the Bonsor can stand the racket. Blest if I 'm not going to send in a bottle of 'fizz' to the ladies and lay it on to some other bloke ; " and so he did.

Drip—drip—drip ! Mud and Melancholy prevailed, and the Company was blue to a man. Only Israels, that man of unbounded resource, might be heard still bullying and worrying, sending niggers skootting to the neighbouring mines, fidgeting and fuming, till at length he burst in on the despondent remnant in the full glory of evening dress.

Down they waded to the Opera-house, where a row of guttering candles formed the footlights to an improvised stage of uneven surface, about which were draped fur-belowes of "limbo." The tearful Prima Donna, fallen from better things, arrayed herself in soiled pink tights, such as would seem to form the every-day attire of dashing heroes of burlesque ; but Miss de Vere—who had a temper of her own, as the luckless Pringle knew—flatly refused to don her finery and spangles until she saw

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something beyond the three empty benches and four deck-chairs "in the front of the house," and who, supported in her determination by Markham and the susceptible M. P., sat on the dissel-boom of an adjacent empty waggon, flanked by both gentlemen. Pringle, suffering martyrdoms of jealousy, held aloft the lady's umbrella, the while he shot infuriated glances at his friend and boon companion of an hour ago.

Eight o'clock — half-past eight — nine ! and still the flickering candles guttered away in empty space. At length Giles, who was stationed as outpost and decoy, gave a low whistle. It was the sign for the orchestra to strike up — there were evidently men on the road. With one bound Tony was at the piano, thundering out an overture for all he was worth. Miss de Vere dived hastily into the improvised dressing-room, and Masters and the Mounted Policeman spread themselves out as audience. Then first one man and then another rolled up from where Giles had waylaid them on their way to the canteen, and before they knew it, some ten or twelve had parted with their

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“quid” to Israels, and sat there gaping. It was a rotten show, and they knew it, yet anything for a change — and, after all, there were “white women” in it, they were worth planking down a “quid” to see!

Most of them were “a bit on” before they’d got so far, so when Pringle shouted for the chorus, they gave it with a will, and warming to the work, even improvised others where there were none wanted. Then a couple of men volunteered to “oblige” with solos, which, though totally different, they both sang at the same time to Tony’s vamping; and every one applauded every one, there being by this time some confusion as to who was who. So when the lights had guttered out and all had adjourned to the canteen, Miss de Vere had bestowed her hand and heart on three separate gentlemen, Pringle and the young Mounted Policeman had been carried to bed, and Percival Markham, leaning on the arm of the Native Commissioner, had told that story of Sir Henry Irving with variations and rising emotion for the hundredth time.

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“M-m-markham”—hiccough—“M-m-markham he shaid derboy—” sobbed the Heavy Lead. Then Tony gave the “Soldiers of the Queen,” and the Boys yelled and cheered to the echo; and amidst the general confusion the Impresario and the Prima Donna retired to count the “treasury.” It came to £19; thus Israels “spoiled the Egyptians,” and “drinks” had to be “chalked up” for the rest of that memorable month.

A KNOT IN THE LOIN-CLOTH

NOT far from Rusarpi, before the narrow gauge had reached as far as it does now, there stood, and for aught I know stands still, a canteen and store with its usual rough annex of rounded dagga huts.

It was early March. White mists, malaria, and general mugginess still hung about the low-lying districts of Mashonaland. Sickness had been abundantly evident that year among both white and black. Labour was scarce, and trade about as bad as it could be.

A few men — perhaps half a dozen — hung about the canteen stoep ; they were men who had been sent down the line to repair the latest “wash-away,” a tramp or two who had just prowled up from no one asked where, as well as Sykes, the storekeeper, and a serjeant of mounted police, who had ridden down from the camp at Old Umtali on his way to Marandella’s.

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“ Much fever up your way, serjeant,” inquired one man, casually.

“ Fair amount,” answered the serjeant, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and prepared to fill it again, “ a very fair amount,—we buried our seventh man last week, and most of them looked more fit to be under the ground than above it, poor devils.”

“ They say it’s played the very deuce with the mine-boys this season,” observed Sykes ; and as he spoke a Kaffir, emerging from a belt of forest-trees in the near distance, might have been seen slowly making his way along the winding highroad, which now in patches presented a series of alternative morass and miniature lakes.

A man reclining in a deck-chair looked up with an imprecation : “ Trust the blooming Kaffir to make himself a nuisance ; if it is n’t their bally crops, it’s their precious bodies— anything to upset the labour market— curse them ! It’s *their* climate ; so why can’t they stick it, that’s what I want to know ? ”

But no one present finding himself in a

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position to solve this enigma, his enquiry remained unanswered, and he was forced to fall back for solace on an ancient number of the "Strand Magazine."

Meanwhile the black speck on the road loomed larger. "The boy" bore the customary long stick, to which were fastened his various goods and chattels,—a cooking-pot and accordion—tied up in a red hand-kerchief, a brightly coloured blanket, and the boots he had taken off when fording the swollen stream a mile or so back as well as to flounder through the squelching slush,—for no primitive Kaffir ever cares to soil his footgear, which he wears more with an eye to personal adornment than use. The group of men, having nothing better to do, took stock of the black, as he slowly and with evident weariness and pain made his way up the slight ascent.

"That brute's about ready to peg out," observed one of the railway men.

"Takes a darn'd lot to kill a nigger," returned another.

"I remember passing him upon the Salisbury road about two days ago, and he looked

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about ready to corpse it then," remarked the older of the two tramps, "and I 've not been travelling fast."

"A mine-boy," again observed the first speaker; "they all seem to go that way when they 've worked the 'low levels' any time — no stamina —"

"Or too frequent 'shifts,'" suggested another. "I 'm dashed if I know how any man, black or white, can stand the fumes of the dynamite without caving in."

By this time the man had got to the top of the path, and standing before the stoep, leant heavily on his staff.

"Sakkabona! baas," was his greeting. He had evidently travelled far, yet he had not adopted the European raiment, like so many of his kind, but was naked to the waist, below which he wore the customary loin-cloth. Upon his wasted limbs, seared with many a healed scar, the coils of wire bangles and anklets hung loosely, jangling as he moved. A round white shell-charm was suspended from his neck, and in his woolly hair stuck the quill of a porcupine.

"Zhuba ri na pisa nāsi" ("The sun

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has been hot to-day ”), continued the boy’s hollow voice, in the Shuna tongue of the district.

“Yebo, umfan,” muttered one or two of the men.

He was about to drop into the customary cross-legged position, when Sykes yelled out, “Not there, you stinking brute—hamba lappa!” and he indicated a spot at the side of the store where offal of all kinds was shot.

The man turned and hesitated. “Zinkwa lo shilling, baas — ?” he inquired timidly.

“Let me see the shilling first, and then we ’ll see about the bread—Bona lo mali, Sammy.” The Kaffir understood the inference and fumbled at his loin-cloth.

“All right,” muttered Sykes ; and they went into the dingy store together, with its nauseating smell of bad liquor, rank tobacco, and stale edibles of various kinds.

The two tramps entered also. Neither spoke to the other, but each asked for a drink, which he swallowed in meditative silence. Then Sykes turned to the batch of square loaves which lay on the counter

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amidst onions, bacon, and other odds and ends. It was poor stuff and unsatisfactory eating, whitened with alum and sour to the taste. He broke off one square hunch and handed it to the Kaffir; it was a sixpenny loaf, but he charged the boy a shilling.

The Kaffir turned aside a moment, and raising the knot in his loin-cloth, untied it. Three men's eyes followed the action as he slowly dropped the coins into the thin pinkish palm of his other hand: there were nine—the men counted them—seven sovereigns and two shillings.

“*Upi sebenza, eh?*” inquired the boss of the store, with his eye on the shining coins.

“*Lappa l-ā-p-p-a!*” replied the “boy,” drawing the word out long, with that expressive inflection a native uses when he wishes to convey magnitude or distance, and he pointed northwestward from where they stood.

“Hartly Hill way, I should think,” remarked the younger tramp, adding, “*hamba lo kraal?*”

“*Yebo, baas,*” returned the boy; and the

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flickering ghost of a smile flitted over his features.

“Now, then, get along out of this,” retorted Sykes, roughly; and the “boy,” whose hacking cough and wasted frame indicated the last stages of consumption, crawled away into the open air again, and crouched down where he had been bidden.

“Fancy a black brute like that saving all that amount of oof,” commented Sykes, as he arranged the bottles at the back of his counter; but neither of the other men seemed to hear the observation, anyway they took no notice of it, but stood in the doorway, watching the sun, which was about to drop behind the long low chain of darkening hills. Then the police serjeant came in for a “stirrup-cup,” and once more there were drinks all round. When the men came out again, the Kaffir had departed.

Soon afterwards the elder tramp paid his score and took the Umtali Road. A little later the young man trekked too, both following the coach road till it reached the bush veldt, where each white man disappeared in an opposite direction.

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Sykes, standing long at his door, shaded his eyes with his hand. The railway-men had gone to the huts for a sleep, being heavy with liquor; so the storekeeper was alone, and he scanned the horizon critically — he even went a little way down the road, where he traced, lost, and caught up again with a “spoor,” and returned, apparently satisfied.

Meanwhile the Kaffir, slowly plodding forward, stumbling in his weakness and resting painfully, shivered as the dark vapour rising floated in a thin film above the marshy grass. One mile — another half-mile — the sun should rise and set twice more before he reached his kraal. Beside a stagnant pool the stricken creature stooped, and making a cup of his hand, moistened his burning lips with the dingy liquid. His head swam, his limbs refused to move, strange objects passed through his rambling brain, then the earth swayed, and all seemed Nothingness. Once more a gleam of consciousness — a flickering up of life — with failing strength he drew forth his blanket, seeking to wrap his shivering limbs as

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best he could. All around was darkness. Noxious reptiles crawled about, and fireflies among the trees shone out like passing eyes of light. And all the time, in an ever narrowing circle, two human Aas-voegel hovered — nearer — nearer — once more he coughed — “ Damn that nigger, would he never die? ”

Hour upon hour — yet lingering life held sway — all through the night. Then silence came, and with it the first faint streak of dawn. Cautiously amidst dead leaves and tangled underwood two figures groped their way. Each man was too intent upon his ghastly purpose to heed the other near. Onward they crept, and stealthily, till, before either was aware, both tramps were standing close beside the thing now stark and still, grinning upward with its vacant stare and hideous dropping jaw.

The elder man started, and for a moment looked like fight; but the younger only gave a short laugh, saying:

“ It seems, mate, we’ve both been on this same job all night — supposing we go halves? ”

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“I’m agreeable,” muttered the older of the two; and without further ado he drew the bowie-knife from his leather belt and stooping, felt for the knot in the loin-cloth — it was gone!

Some other knife had cut it clean away, leaving naught but the jagged edge of flimsy limbo in mute witness of the deed.

“Sold, by G—d!” exclaimed the man, as he rose up, white with rage. The younger turned the body over with the toe of his boot. “Not so much as the price of a drink,” he muttered, “and I’ve come a good two miles off my track for the sake of this blasted nigger!”

“Someone’s been here before us, d’ you see that?” said the other; and he pointed to the impress of a boot, steps which had come from, and returned to the opposite direction. Both men bent down and examined the “spoor,” following it for some distance, — it led the way they had come, only in a more direct line.

“Some one from the canteen, eh, mate?”

“You bet it was!”

Then the younger whistled, and having

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a sense of humour, laughed aloud. They had reached the highroad by now.

“Going ahead?” enquired the elder man, surlily, nodding eastward.

“No, back towards Headlands —”

“Then I’ll say so-long.”

“So-long, mate,” returned the younger with a grin, “and may we both have better luck next time!”

So each man went his way, while in the bush-veldt the body of the Kaffir “boy” lay rotting.

SILWAN, OF THE KING'S IMPI

DOWN in a hollow, if you leave the Sebawke mines to your left and make for the "wood road," crossing the drift five or six miles higher up, you will find a bit of a shanty with a strip of kitchen garden behind it, where cabbages, tomatoes, and granadillas planted after a haphazard fashion once grew in rank luxuriance.

This place was not a store, the road not being frequented enough to make a license pay. Still, Christy never lacked for drink, and fellows coming along the track for Mapani-wood were well aware that they could liquor up if they wanted to in a "friendly sort of way" (for "a consideration" and on the strict "Q. T."). For the rest, Christy was a charcoal-burner—or supposed to be—when he was not doing a steady booze, and this was oftenest the case. There was a heavy, quiet brutality about

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the man. You could see it writ large all over him,—coward, bully, beast.

At the present moment his lack-lustre eyes were turned in the direction of a couple of transport waggons to which the trek oxen, two teams of sixteen bullocks each, were being inspanned prior to taking the road again. These waggons were empty ones, the men being on their way up to the forest for the load, and they had loitered and loitered just as fellows on the trek will do, till the sky near the horizon had begun to look threatening, and they knew that if they meant to cross the river before it rose and swelled from a shallow line of limpid silver to a leaden torrent of tempestuous waves, as these African streams have a way of doing, it would behove them to negotiate that drift before nightfall.

There were three men going up with the waggons. One, however, was merely a fellow on the shoot, with whom the others had fallen in at the canteen, midway between the Chicago-Gaika and the Globe and Phœnix mines. There was some big game up this way,—lions, as well as herds of zebra and

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sable antelope, and the Mapani-wood men being good fellows, as well as sick of each other's company, had offered to give the shootist a lift, with the benefit of their advice and experience thrown in ; and the man, who was a bit of a new chum, had accepted with the greatest alacrity.

So the three men, with Christy, hung about the door preparatory to departure, hitched up their "bags," tightened their belts, and tugged down the brims of their battered felt hats, for the sun was hot and glaring. Now and again they roared out some peremptory order to the Kaffirs, who were dodging the horns of the last refractory ox, — a beast that, for reasons best known to itself, was stubbornly resisting the adjustment of yoke, skathes, and intango.

There were three Kaffir boys and a couple of piccanins — one little shaver as fore-louper to each team — and of the Kaffirs one was seated cross-legged in the foreground. He was smoking, the lighted end of the cigarette being in his mouth, — a native's favourite fashion of enjoying the nicotine, — and from time to time he would

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give some direction to his sweating underlings as they struggled with the obstinate brute, giving it with that curious drawl peculiar to this race,—in language as unlike the kitchen-Kaffir reserved for intercourse with the white “Baas” as English is to Greek, and at the same time emphasising his speech with the quiet, even dignified gestures of a man accustomed rather to command than obey,—a manner striking in its contrast to the blustering swagger of the two white men. Its singularity even attracted the attention of the man on the shoot, for he observed in a casual way: “That nigger seems to be a better breed than those other johnnies;” and he nodded in the direction of the man, who had now risen to his feet and stood with the long whip ready in his hand awaiting the order to start, for he was the driver.

“So he is,” replied the man this remark was addressed to,—“so he is; a Zantzi,¹ I

¹ There are three race-classes in the land:—

1. The Zantzis (*i. e.* those from “down below”) are Zulus and superior to the Euhlas, being essentially the fighting men.

2. The Euhlas are those, *not* of the Zulu race, nor of

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believe, while those other beggars are ‘ common or garden ’ Makalakas, just about what the ‘ upper ten ’ are to the ‘ hoi polloi,’ as you might say.”

“ Is that Silwan you ’re speaking of, eh ? ” queried the second Mapani-wood man. “ Oh, Silwan ’s a regular toff, or has been. A queer, silent chap, too, but a devil to work after his own fashion. They say he was one of Lo Ben ’s young bloods, in a crack impi, sort of guardsman, regular howling swell, you know ! ” and the three men laughed.

But the shootist broke off suddenly with, “ What the deuce is he staring at ? ”

“ Oh, he ’s waiting for the word of command,” returned the first man, who generally took the lead ; “ standing at attention as a military gent should do,” he continued ; and raising his voice, he shouted out : “ All right, Silwan ; fire ahead, Ambage.”

The fore-loupers, the two boys, and the

the country, but a people who by common consent agreed to live under their race, and brought “ gifts ” of submission. They state they originally came from Basutoland.

3. The Holis or Rolis are the lowest in the social scale. They were the “ slaves ” or original inhabitants of this country, and consist of the Makalakas and others. — S. C.

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cattle heard and acted on the order, the piccanins bending their little skinny bodies as they scaled the steep ascent, turning about each time they had secured a foothold among the rolling stones and tightening their hold on the "reims" by which they guided the foremost couple of the floundering team. The two Makalakas threw up their arms, and waved their sticks, shrieking and dancing alongside while doing nothing of any practical use; but the Zantzi boy, whip in hand, still stood rooted to the spot.

"Seems struck silly," remarked the second man, while his mate, who was a fiery chap, started forward with an oath. "Ambage, d' you hear? you damned black brute, and don't you let me have to say it again, that's all!"

The man seemed hardly to notice the words; but the spell, whatever it had been, was broken. He turned, bounded up the slope like an antelope and with the rest of the cavalcade, disappeared from sight, for the hill dipped slightly on the other side.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" ejaculated the shootist, with a slight laugh, as he turned round. Christy was standing just behind,

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lounging in his doorway with his hands in his trouser-pockets.

“Did you see that, eh? By Jove, Christy, I believe it was you that fascinated him! I’ll take my Bible oath it was n’t I.”

“Strikes me I’ve seen that niggar somewhere before. Suppose he’s been through with the waggon,” remarked Christy, but he spoke without interest.

“Not with ours,” returned the second man. “Me and my mate took him on at the Belingwe.”

“Suppose I’m mistaken then,” said Christy. So the matter dropped, and the three men, with a parting nod to their host, strolled on up the hill to where the waggons had halted to wait for them.

The gathering storm-cloud glowered darkly overhead. A terrific clap of thunder rent the air, and the belt of young trees skirting the roadway was swept by a fierce gust of wind overpowering in its suddenness and velocity. The three men scrambled in under the waggon tent, and made themselves comfortable after the fashion of old campaigners, while the Kaffirs struggled into their hybrid selection

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of wraps and bent their heads before the falling rain. Only Silwan, the driver, strode on apparently heedless of the elements warring around him. He certainly bore, as the men had jokingly observed, "the stamp of the aristocrat;" the tall lithe frame and the swinging stride betokened a man accustomed to quick action, abundant exercise, and a free unfettered life; even the face, for all its Bantu features, had an impress of "class distinction" while the head surmounted by the "ring-kop" was well poised, and the eyes remarkably intelligent. The man's dress, too, was as different from that of his fellows as was his general bearing; for while the Makalaka boys and piccanins masqueraded in all the glory of the white man's cast-off raiment or cheap shoddy, imported by the enterprising Kaffir-storekeeper and retailed at "cent per cent" prices for the natives' own particular adornment, Silvan's only concession to European prejudices consisted in a light-coloured flannel shirt, open at the neck and bound about the waist with a strip of red limbo, the rest of it fluttering in the breeze like the skirts of a Highlander's kilt. His nether

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limbs were bare, unadorned even by the usual profusion of bangles, and the knob-kerri stuck through the folds at his waist was the only accessory he bore,— save the waggon whip, whose long lash licked in great swishing curves like a sharp tongue about the cattle's horns, while his curious voice—a hissing, lisping drawl—rolled out the cry: “Haïk — ! Ambage ! Sticklan, Brokman, Weissman, Ambage ! Haïk !”

Down came the rain in great white sheets, driving in slantwise under the waggon hood. The men drew their blankets about them, lit their pipes, and uncorked the whiskey.

“ Queer cove,” muttered the man on the shoot, meditatively, and as it were to no one in particular, as he set down his tumbler and smacked his lips.

“ Who ? ” enquired the first Mapani-wood man.

“ That fellow Christy, down yonder,” retorted the man on the shoot ; and he jerked his head in the direction of the shanty down in the hollow.

“ Yes, he *is* a queer sort of cove,” commented the first man ; “ been in most things,

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too, since he came in here with the Salisbury column."

"When I first knew him, he was in the Police," put in the second man.

"Chucked that after the rebellion, did n't he?"

Second man nodded. "So did I," he observed, adding, "Where were you then, Bill?"

"I'd just gone into Gwelo, as good luck would have it, else I should n't have been here to tell the tale, for every white along the Ingwainia was murdered that night, and I'd been prospecting along there."

"Of course, of course," said the second man, "poor Fitzgerald and the rest of them. By Jove! you had a narrow squeak, though;" and he helped himself to another shot of whiskey and passed the bottle.

"I suppose there must have been provocation and faults on both sides," remarked the shootist, with the wearied air of a man endeavouring to take an impartial view of a matter that does not very much interest him.

"Plenty," said the other man, briefly;

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“and though I’m dashed if I can stick all that twaddle and cant about the nigger question, mind you there were some dirty tricks played on the natives, and there’s no getting away from it, either.”

There was a momentary pause.

“I say, Bill,” resumed the second man, “do you remember that affair of the Mata-bele girl?”

“Ja,” grunted the first man.

“What was that?” queried their guest, his languid interest flickering up again.

“Oh — well, we were n’t there,” returned the second man, evasively. “Christy was, though; perhaps he’d tell you, perhaps he would n’t. Queer, though. I seem to think of it whenever I meet that chap;” and there was another pause of longer duration, while the men liquored up in silence, and lifting a corner of the tarpaulin peered out over the damp and sodden landscape, mentally calculating what chance there might be of crossing the river that night.

“It was a dreadful affair altogether, and then the rinderpest following on top — I suppose that but for that we should be hav-

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ing splendid returns on the money invested in the country by this time," observed the man on the shoot.

"Think so?" said the first man, laconically; while the other gave a short laugh and exclaimed :

"Wait till you've been up a bit longer, my boy. I'm blessed if it does n't strike me that the native revolt and the cattle scourge came in most opportune like."

"How so?" asked the man on the shoot, as he sat up and refilled his pipe.

"For why?" retorted the second man, "'cos how could any reasonable shareholder expect dividends out of anything after two such dire calamities? Oh, it makes a fellow sick, sitting tight and hanging on and worrying his very soul-case out, and the devil a prospect that I can see anywhere since they came a bloomin' cropper over the Raid."

Now the shootist, who had but lately arrived, "knew not these things," as it were. Had he not read up his Theodore Bent and the Company's Report, besides the opinions expressed by numerous gentle-

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men in whom “the wish was father to the thought,” and was he not therefore in a position to “gauge the country’s prospects”? Did he not even meditate a volume himself in which all these themes should be exhaustively treated? This want of faith on the part of the Mapani-wood men jarred like a discordant note. But, as he said to himself, “men of this class are always growling.”

“I conclude,” remarked he, “that as great a mining future awaits this country as ever did the Transvaal, where for years the unsuspecting Boer trekked across the barren veldt,—across the very spot where we now have the golden City with all its hum and feverish activity.”

“Hear, hear!” cried the second man, with jocularity.

But the first man put in drily: “Yes, of course, we know all that. However you’ve forgotten one slight difference, that the Rand has a *banket* formation and Rhodesia has n’t.” At which remark the second man was moved to unseemly language concerning “pockets” and “blow-outs.”

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"It's been the same game of bluff ever since the Concession hunters did old Lo Ben a bloomin' shot in the eye," he blurted out, "and we are n't going to stand it indefinitely, either. Something will have to be done."

"And something will be done," agreed the first man, cheerfully. "Wipe out the Republic, shake both shows up together so that you don't know 't' other from which' and see if we don't come out on top and smiling."

The man on the shoot had recourse to the whiskey bottle, in order to assist him in sorting his ideas. "Look here," he said at length, "you fellows all say the thing's played out, and that you're all stony and the rest of it. But just look at the buildings going up in Bulawayo, for instance; there must be money somewhere."

"Public companies, that's all," quoth the second man, "shareholders' money. You'll see the same thing if you go up to Salisbury, but there's precious little private speculation of that sort going on now."

"Yes," growled the first man, "I'm hanged if I can get rid of my stands;

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they 're never likely again to go up to the price I gave for them in the days when I was green and used to bid for chunks of veldt at Charlie Maddock's sales at the Charter of a Saturday night ;" and they lapsed into a contemplative silence once more.

The day had drawn in by this time. Some rain still fell, but its violence had abated. The teams had made but slow progress, owing to the marshy nature of the soil, into which the heavy wheels sank deeper and deeper at every turn.

" We must be nearing the drift," observed the first man, and he called out to the driver.

" Baas ! " responded the man, and Silwan appreared at the opening of the tent.

" How about the river ? Are we near ? " enquired the Boss.

" Yebo, baas," responded the black man, " but the waters are angry and the night is dark ;" and even as he spoke, the roar of the torrent could be heard, as it thundered its headlong course between its precipitous banks.

" That means that we 've got to outspan

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and jolly well stick here for the next two, if not three days," muttered the man, turning round to his companions; and each as in duty bound indulged in a flowery imprecation, though as a matter of fact no one was in a hurry. Who on the veldt ever is? Still, it seems to come natural to curse the river when it's up. Soon, however, they had settled down to the inevitable. The oxen were outspanned and tethered near at hand. The piccanins were busy building fires, and soon the red glow of the crackling logs lit up the camp, making a cosey and comfortable enough picture even on a soaking night like this.

Supper being disposed of, the white men gathered round one fire, and the Kaffirs round another, while to be on the safe side, for they were in the lion district, they set fire to a tree in the rear of the waggon warranted to burn all night and collapse in the morning.

Only one doubt weighed heavily upon their minds; it concerned the whiskey—would it hold out? It was a momentous question. Each man took the bottle, eyed

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it, and came to the same conclusion,— that it *might* hold out till morning, but he doubted it.

“We’d better send back and get a couple of bottles off Christy,” opined the first Mapani-wood man. Both his companions strongly endorsed the advisability of so doing as a precautionary measure against “snake bites,” and he called for Silwan; but there was no response.

One of the boys and a piccanin who had been to fetch water passed at this moment.

“Upi lo Silwan!” enquired the man.

“Hamba,” returned the boy laconically, and was passing on—

“Hamba! Upi Hamba,” retorted the man, nettled.

“Ikona,” drawled the boy, who was one of the aggravatingly lackadaisical sort.

“*Ikona?*” mimicked the man. “I’ll ‘Ikona’ you — bisa lo!” he blurted out with an oath.

It was such an odd thing for Silwan to do!

• • • • •

After the transport waggons and the men had left the hollow, Christy turned into his

Silwan, of the King's Impi

abode again. He pitched away the empty bottles — there were several — and gathered up the greasy cards, for they had been playing, and as fellows who took a hand at " nap " or " euchre " with Christy generally lost, he made a bit that way.

He moved about the place in an absent-minded manner and with an uncertain step. He had been drinking, but was not drunk. It took a good deal to make him helplessly so, and though this sort of thing was all very well now and again (for every dram he had had at the other fellow's expense had put the price of one or two into his own pocket), yet the steady soak was what he infinitely preferred, — drink, smoke, smoke, drink, — a drifting into foggy restfulness, that muddled condition followed by heavy slumber and stentorian breathing.

There was no Kaffir at the shanty. Christy did n't keep a permanent boy. The natives on the way from their kraals to the neighbouring mines or *vice versa* would occasionally put in a week or two with him, but it never lasted longer. " Deep levels " were almost better than the perpetual application

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of Christy's boot, and the boy generally skooted long before the time agreed upon was up. The last boy had decamped a few days since, for similar reasons as those mentioned, and it therefore fell upon Christy to do his own "bossing up."

After having performed these offices in a perfunctory way, he flung himself on to his stretcher. The shanty really only consisted of one room. It was close and ill-ventilated ; the fumes of much liquor and stale tobacco-smoke hung about it, and the air was oppressive, as it always is when the "rains" are on. He had left the door open to catch any breeze that might be coming that way, and lay back musing, his drink-sodden brain slightly more active than usual. When you live off the track and don't see another fellow more than once in a month or so, the arrival of three white men, all of a heap as it were, becomes a sort of event in the monotony of your daily existence ; and this is naturally more than ever the case when two of them turn out to be old chums, — fellows you 've "been in things with" before.

Not that "chumminess" is quite the right

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term to apply to the degree of acquaintance existing between the Mapani-wood men and Christy. He was n't a fellow to "pal on to," somehow, though at the first blush of meeting again men are apt to get effusively familiar, and all those little recollections each one can recall, if he has a mind to, are temporarily shelved.

The sight of the two Mapani-wood men had raised a host of varying recollections in Christy's memory; so had the sight of Silwan, but as yet only unconsciously.

Slowly, out of the chaos of past events, scenes in which Christy and now and again one of the Mapani-wood men had played a part, came gliding through his brain, like pictures on the slides of a magic lantern. There was the rebellion — yes, and before that the campaign against Lo Ben, when they had followed the spoor of the dying king's waggon away out on the measureless tract of veldt. Then, soon after the Occupation, there had been that incident relating to some quarrel or misunderstanding respecting the hut tax. Several of them had gone up to the kraal in or near the Matop-

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pos, and rated the chief, and on the way back collared cattle — and girls. Christy had appropriated a woman, too. The girl had cried and fought and bitten him, and Christy had silenced all such show of savage temper with the butt end of his rifle. Now it turned out that there was more fuss made over the abduction of this one girl than over all the rest put together, and at last one or two men of the party came up to Christy and said :

“I say, look here ! you’d better let that girl go, or you’ll land us in a devil of a mess. Her people are in an awful state, carrying on like mad, for her father has just been paid ‘lobola’ for her by some native swell in the king’s impi, ten head of cattle — if she’s put down as worth that, it may be serious.”

However, this was just enough to pique a man like Christy into obstinacy. He stuck to the girl, and they had a narrow squeak in getting down to camp again, though they got through without mishap, taking the women and the cattle with them.

Time passed ; the men threw the women

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aside, and thought no more about them, as white men do. Then came the rebellion. Whatever the white man had been guilty of in his hour of conquest, he was "getting his own back" again, and — as would seem the pleasure of an inscrutable Providence — the innocent was suffering with the guilty.

In an out-of-the-way spot was a poorly manned camp where a few men had hastily entrenched themselves, all that part of the country being disaffected. One night there was a hue and cry in the laager, and what seemed more like a bundle of rags than anything else was hustled into their midst.

"What's up?" enquired the fellow on whom the command had fallen.

"Spy, or at least so we suspect."

"Put a guard over him and shoot him in the morning;" and the man was turning away, but the youngster who had brought the cowering creature in hesitated.

"It's a woman," he stammered; "got a kid on her back."

"Take off her blanket," said the man.

The young policeman tore away the ragged rug the woman had wrapped about

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her, and the man, looking at the woman, said in her own tongue, "Why are you here?"

"I came, Incos, because there is danger!"

"You came to spy out the doings of the M'lungu" (the white man).

"Not so, Incos, I speak truly." The woman stood erect. She was practically nude now that they had taken her blanket, but on her back, suspended in a cradle, formed of a strip of some wild beast's skin, hung a tiny half-caste child.

"Go! You lie," cried the man, angrily; and the young policeman dragged her away.

Next day they shot her for a spy,—shot her while the heavy dew still lay on the long damp grass,—shot her with the half-white baby,—shot once more to give her the *coup de grâce* where the writhing form lay moaning on the blood-stained ground. Then the firing-party trailed into laager again, and every man avoided his chief that day.

But the woman had been right, after all. The small camp was taken by surprise

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that night, and one of the few to escape alive was the chief, and he happened to be Christy.

He rose from his stretcher, lit a candle, and helped himself to another shot of spirit. His hand shook, and some of it went over, but he drank the rest down at a gulp, neat.

Somehow these memories came up most vividly to-night after seeing the Mapani-wood fellows. Not that Christy was afflicted with anything so inconvenient as a conscience, only, when his nerves were "jumpy," as for instance now, the woman's shrieks of mortal agony would ring in his ears. They followed him everywhere at such times,—there was no getting away from them. He turned back to the stretcher to lie down again—Was that the wind?—or *did* the door move? Yes, by Jove, it *did* move!—he'd—he'd—shut it! He made a wavering movement forward, but it creaked back on its hinges and a Kaffir entered and closed it on the inside.

"Who are you?" roared the white man,

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and he repeated the question in Kaffir, stepping back ; but his hand was on his revolver, for he was sober now.

“ I am Silwan, of the King’s impi,” came the answer, and with a bound he flung the white man back.

They fell crashing midst the bottles and glasses, extinguishing the light.

“ *You know me? You remember?* Ha, white man!” came the hissing voice through the darkness, while the weight and overpowering odour of the black body turned him faint. Yes, *he remembered!* and Christy struggled to free his right hand. Then he pulled the trigger *once — twice —* and the nerveless arm fell. The knob-kerrie had done its ghastly work, so had the revolver, and Silwan of the King’s impi reeled forward across his victim. A rattle in the throat, a tightening of the muscles in the death-struggle — and silence.

In the morning, Silwan having skooted, the man on the shoot volunteered to go for the whiskey, and the second Mapani-wood man thought he could n’t do better than

Silwan, of the King's Impi

bear him company on so laudable an expedition. So they set off the first thing, while the day was yet cool.

“Late for Christy not to be astir,” quoth the man.

“Sleeping off yesterday's booze,” suggested the shootist.

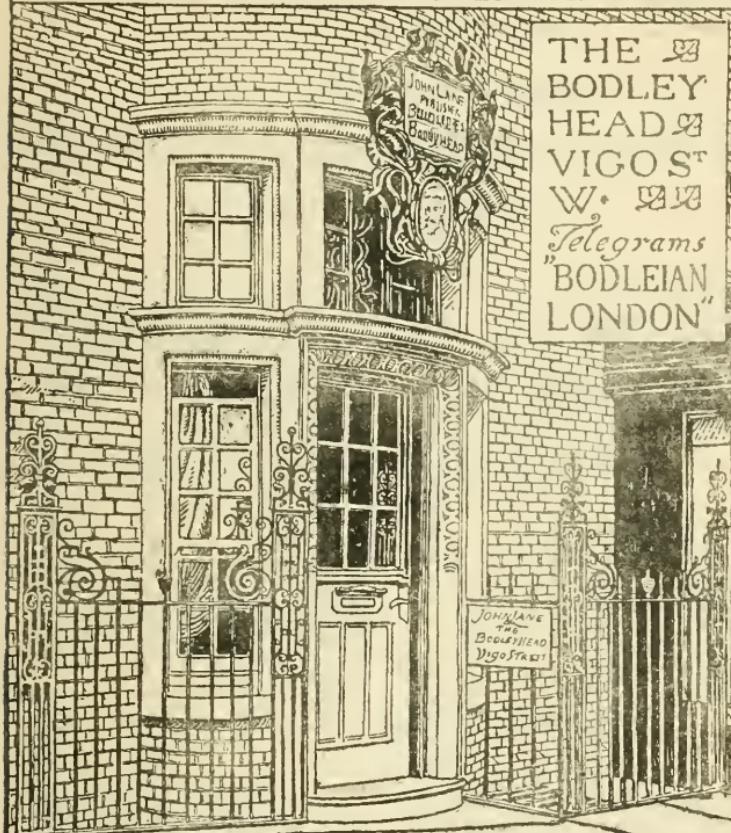
“Right you are!” rejoined his companion, with a laugh, and kicked open Christy's door.

“Oh, my God!” he exclaimed, and turned round.

They flung the door wide. Both men lay with their black and white limbs intertwined, rigid, in that awful uncanny stillness of death, while a dark, wet patch told a tale of unspeakable horror. Then the two living men turned away, and after a while the Mapani-wood man delivered himself of this :

“I've heard that ‘the mills of God grind slowly, but grind exceeding small.’”

JOHN LANE



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